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# Dress Like a Man

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A Style Guide For  
Practical Men Wanting  
To Improve Their  
Professional  
Personal  
Appearance

Antonio Centeno

**FREE**  
Poster  
Images

# A MAN'S GUIDE TO STYLE

THE ULTIMATE FASHION BOOK FOR MEN

*The web's best guide for men looking to dress sharp & use clothing to their advantage.*

by

Antonio Centeno and Geoffrey Cabbage

illustrations by Anthony Tan and Ted Slampyak

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First Edition

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Congratulations!

Your purchase of A Man's Guide to Style comes with *free* poster-sized infographics from [www.RealMenRealStyle.com](http://www.RealMenRealStyle.com).

We've included nine illustrated posters on everything from how to wear black tie to how to fold a suit jacket and how to tie your necktie eighteen different ways.

They're our gift to you, free with the purchase of this book.

To access the bonus posters, go to <http://www.realmenrealstyle.com/dresslike-a-man-bonus/> and use the password "dresslikeaman" -- all one word and no capital letters.

Enjoy!

## **Section 1: Introduction**

## CHAPTER 1: THE ONLY STYLE GUIDE YOU'LL EVER NEED

Every generation produces one or two style manuals that become true classics.

Men of the early 21st century -- this is one of yours.

We've taken full advantage of the e-book format to cram as much information into this work as possible. Bound and published, it would rival some textbooks for weight. You could do some serious damage swinging it around.

But instead of straining your wrists, you can swipe through effortlessly on your tablet or your phone. Ain't technology something?

This isn't some Amazon quick read, or a preview to get you to buy a real book. It's everything you need to know about menswear, condensed into one e-book and sold for the lowest price possible. We made it good and we made it affordable because we want to *impress* you.

So read on. And be impressed.

### How to Use this E-Book

This isn't a book you sit down and read in one go. It's much too big for that.

Believe us when we tell you up front -- this thing's too big to tackle all at once.

So relax. Take it slow. Browse around a bit. Make full use of the ebook format. Sections are interlinked so that you can skip easily from one to the next. We recommend it.

Some of this stuff gets pretty technical. Don't overwhelm yourself. If you're getting bored reading about the difference between vented and unvented jackets, or worsted versus flannel wool, *stop reading*. There's not going to be a quiz at the end.

This is your book. Enjoy it.

## CHAPTER 2: THE CASE FOR STYLE (5 REASONS TO DRESS WELL)



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Men's style: why bother?

It's a natural question, especially if your idea of "style" comes from runway shows.

But there's more to menswear than experimental fashions on unhealthily slender models.

Upgrading your look can lead to big rewards, even for casually-dressed men who don't face a professional dress code. Here are just a few of the reasons style matters for all men:

## **1. Dressing Well Opens Doors for You**

A good outfit opens doors, literally and figuratively.

From getting past the bouncer and skipping the line at a nightclub to being invited up to the boss's office for a private chat about pay, you're going to go further in a nice jacket and slacks than you are in blue jeans and a flannel.

People assume that a man who's dressing better than the men around him is doing it for a reason. You might not actually have a reason, beyond wanting to look good -- but that won't stop people from assuming that you're a person of consequence.

Turns out, a little bit of favorable assumption goes a long way.

## **2. Well-Dressed Men Get the Benefit of the Doubt**

Perceptions of wealth, status, and influence are deeply ingrained in our society. You can like it or not, but it's how the world works.

When you look "respectable," people assume as a default that you're an okay guy. You can always prove them wrong (being a well-dressed jerk won't hide the fact that you're a jerk for long) but you start with a favorable baseline impression.

Guys who don't dress well, on the other hand, don't get any benefit of the doubt, and they may even face negative attention. If you're looking sloppy in an upscale setting, or dressing like someone's idea of a student or a child, you can expect to be treated with dismissal or outright hostility at least some of the time.

It'd be nice if we lived in a world where every man was judged solely by his actions, regardless of his appearance. But we don't -- so go ahead and make life easier on yourself by dressing nicely as a habit.

## **3. Dressing Well Makes You More Successful**

Other people's perceptions matter -- but so do your own!



Personal appearance has a well-established "talisman effect." If you believe that you're dressing like someone successful, it has an actual, positive effect on your own performance.

One of the more interesting studies on the subject, done at Northwestern University, showed that participants scored higher on math/science tests when they were given a doctor's white lab coat to wear -- but scored lower when given the same coat and told that it was an artist's smock.

The same principles apply to business and social clothing. When you take the time to put yourself together in a way that you know looks attractive and impressive, you actually start acting more like an attractive, impressive kind of guy.

#### **4. Good Grooming Habits Are Good Habits in General**

Dressing well is not all that challenging.

But it does require a little attention to detail. And when you're buying nice clothes you're more inclined to take good care of them than when you're wearing any old thing, so along the way you start to pick up some good habits.

Organizing your closet, thinking about patterns and colors, cleaning and maintaining items with different requirements -- it all helps make you a more careful, thoughtful person overall.

It's why the military places such a heavy emphasis on appearance. Soldiers who get in the habit of doing things 100% perfect the first time, even when it's as unimportant a task as shining their shoes, are soldiers who are less likely to screw things up when important things (like their lives) are on the line.



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## 5. You Never Know Who You're Going to Meet

Realtors use the concept of "curbside appeal" to talk about whether or not a house stands out to casual passers-by.

Your appearance works the same way. If you're dressed sharp, you have "curbside appeal." You stand out. People notice you, and like what you see.

Most of the time, you're only going to be impressing strangers. But you never know who you're going to meet, or where, and if you're well-dressed as a general habit, you never have to worry about that one chance meeting with a boss, a respected peer, a potential romantic interest, or even a rival that you don't want to embarrass yourself in front of.

You'll also be reaping the usual benefits of dressing well, of course -- additional respect, the assumption that you're a fine, upstanding citizen, and all that good stuff. But equally importantly, you'll be prepared to impress anyone you need to, at all times, without advance warning.

## Personal Style: A Lot of Reward for Very Little Effort

So let's look back over our list here.

We've got personal and professional advancement, social advantages, self-improvement, good mental training, and constant "curbside appeal" from dressing well -- and that's just the first few examples.

Given that improving your look is easy and affordable (as we'll be discussing throughout this work, don't worry), why *wouldn't* a man want to put a little thought into his personal style?

It's a whole lot of reward for very little effort. And that's a bargain you can get into even if you're not a big fan of runway shows.

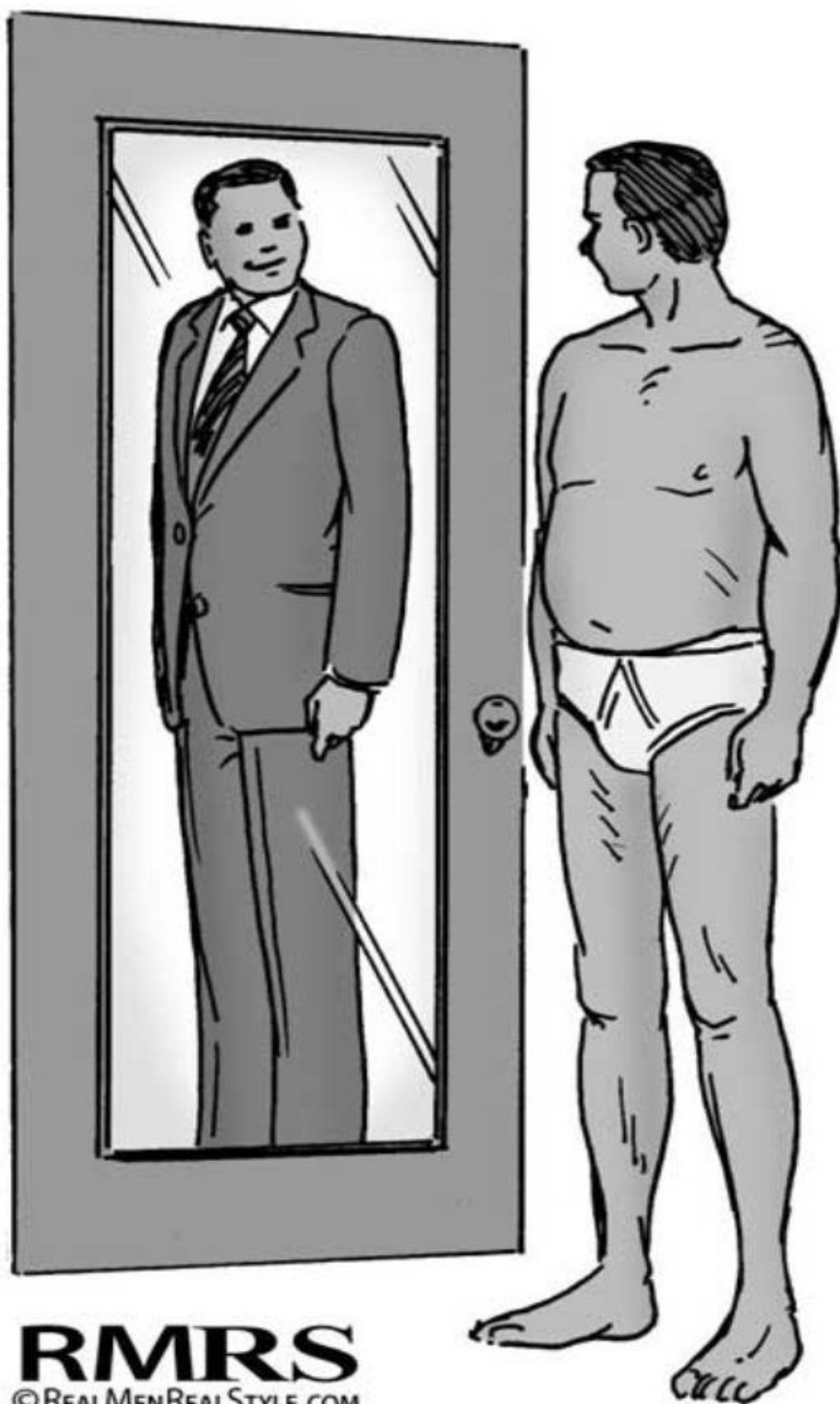
## CHAPTER 3: IS STYLE MANLY?

Ah, the age-old nagging doubt of a man picking up his first style manual: *is it okay for me to be doing this?*

Yes. Yes, it is. Relax and enjoy yourself! This stuff is fun.

Think about it this way: whatever your definition of "manly" might be, it probably doesn't include feeling nervous about a book, or about clothing.

So don't. Approach this stuff with confidence and class. Turns out, you'll be in good company.



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## Men's Style: An Evolutionary Success

When we say "fashion," modern readers tend to think of things like catalogs, photo shoots, and glamour magazines.

But fashion is much, much older than that, and it's more deeply ingrained in our cultural consciousness than most people are aware of.

Style is literally as old as humanity itself. Ever since our early ancestors first figured out how to drape themselves in hides for warmth, there was a status attached to the guy who had the *niciest* hide.

You can see evidence of this in the burial sites of leaders from just about every civilization in the ancient world: they were interred with their weapons, their armor, and their jewelry. Those were the things that set them apart from other, lesser men.

The association between a unique personal appearance and high status has stayed with us, all the way through various royal families and military establishments into the present day.

## The Manly Virtues of Good Dressing

There's a limit to how much you can talk about things being "manly" without starting to sound a little silly in this day and age.

But when people do talk about manliness they're usually talking about virtues of character: dependability, trustworthiness, responsibility, and so on.

Is it a stretch to say that good dressers embody those virtues?

Maybe a little bit. But maintaining your appearance does require -- and display -- a certain amount of personal responsibility. Not *much* responsibility, but more than a lot of people display in their daily appearances, so the bar is set nice and low for you.

## Famous "Manly" Men Who Dressed Well

Need a few examples? Here are a few guys whose macho credit is undeniable -- and who make (or made, in the case of the deceased) an effort to look sharp, whether they're on screen or just going about their daily lives.

- Arnold Schwarzenegger

- Brad Pitt
- Bruno Mars
- Carey Grant
- Daniel Craig
- David Beckham
- Edward, the Duke of Windsor
- Enrique Iglesias
- George Clooney
- Humphrey Bogart
- James Dean
- Johnny Cash
- John Wayne
- Marlon Brando
- Prince Harry of Wales
- Sean Combs (Puff Daddy)
- Shahrukh Khan
- Steve McQueen
- Will Smith

We could go on (and on, and on, and on), but you get the point.

These are not just ordinary, everyday guys. These are men -- real, world-beating, macho men, in their own fields or overall. They're famous, and rightly so.

And they all dress (or dressed) well.

So maybe don't spend too much time worrying about whether or not it's "manly" to dress stylishly. The evidence would suggest the answer is "no."

And honestly, there's not much manly about worrying in general. Dress like you do everything else: confidently.

## **Section 2: Building a Wardrobe**



## CHAPTER 4: THE STYLE PYRAMID

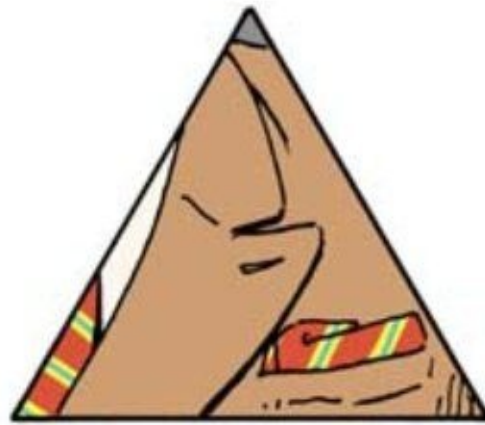
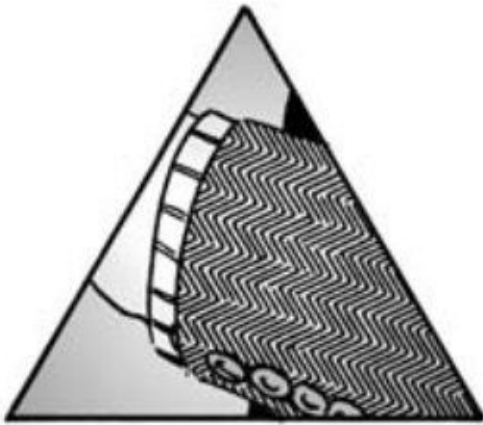
Whether you think of yourself as a stylish dresser or not, it's helpful to have a system for clothes shopping that doesn't waste any time or money.

The "style pyramid" is a simple triage that keeps you from buying needless wardrobe items.

Here's how it works: check everything you buy against each level of the pyramid. If it meets the criterion in question, go up a level and keep checking. If it doesn't meet your standards for that level of the pyramid, put it back and don't worry about the rest.

The style pyramid works in three simple, ascending levels: *fit, fabric, and fashion*.

Start at the bottom (fit) and work your way up. Something that makes it all the way to the top, meeting your standards at every level, is worth considering. Something that fails on any level isn't going to be a good purchase, no matter how tempting the brand or the price.



## Fit

The base of the style pyramid is fit.

That's is not a metaphor -- that's how clothing works. A good fit is the basis of *everything* else.

A few simple adjustments can make even a pretty battered thrift store cast-off look sharp, when worn with the right accents. And a thousand dollar suit can easily look like something cheap and off-the-rack if the fit's done wrong.

So before you worry about anything else, ask yourself if every piece of clothing you buy is a good fit.

### *Telling a Good Fit from a Bad One*

Most clothing will not be a perfect fit right off the rack. As the old saying in the fashion industry goes, "ready-to-wear isn't."

Mass-produced clothing, whatever the size on the label says, tends to be produced as loose as possible, so that the maximum number of men can at least fit inside the garment.

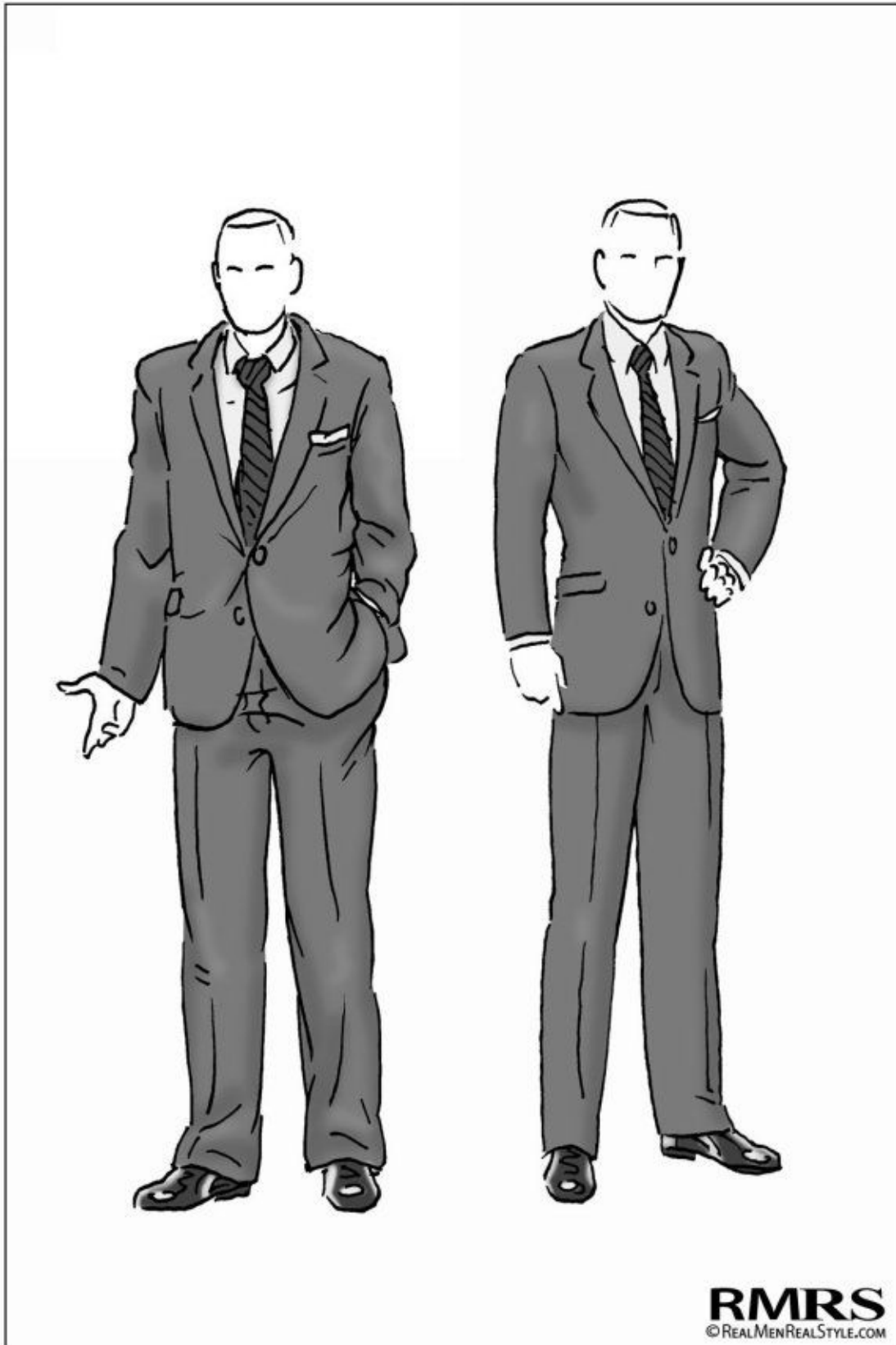
"Fit inside" isn't the same thing as "look good in," however, and you don't want to confuse the two. Just because something slips on without pinching doesn't mean it's a good fit.

Later on in this book we'll go through all the common garments in menswear on an individual basis. Specifics of fit will get covered in detail there. But overall, when you're trying clothes on in the store, a good fit is one that:

- doesn't pinch, pull, or strain anywhere
- has no wrinkled lines from stretching to fit
- doesn't sag or billow, especially at junctions like the crotch and armpits
- reaches all the way down your limbs
- doesn't reach beyond your wrists/ankles
- doesn't leave large gaps between the cloth and your body

You can tell this stuff with a quick, unscientific examination. We're not talking brain surgery here. Just look in the mirror and see if it's drooping or sagging anywhere.

A fit that's too tight is even easier to identify, since you'll feel it against your body. It's not likely that you're ever going to have to run or jump in most of your clothing, but if it feels like you physically couldn't, the fit's too tight.



*Adjustments: Making an Okay Fit into a Good Fit*

If you apply a standard of perfect fit to everything you try on, very few items of clothing will make the grade.

The reality is that, unless you have a body with the exact same measurements that got programmed into the factory machines, all off-the-rack clothes are going to have an imperfect fit somewhere.

And that's fine. The trick is knowing which imperfect fits can be easily (and cheaply) turned into perfect ones by a skilled tailor.

Minor adjustments are cheap and quick. They're the secret weapon of all the stylish men you know. If a guy looks consistently sharp, you can bet he gets his clothes adjusted.

The following list describes the cheapest and easiest clothing adjustments. These are the places you can accept a little bit of a bad fit in the changing room, since you know you'll be having them adjusted anyway:

- trouser length (easy to shorten)
- shirt waist looseness (easy to take in)
- cuff length (a little tougher than trousers, but still simple)
- jacket waist looseness (a little pricier than shirts, but not too bad)

In all cases, it's easier to take something that's too loose or too long and make it smaller. Tailors are limited by the amount of cloth in the garment. They can't make a sleeve longer than whatever spare cloth is lurking under the hem.

More difficult adjustments include the width of a collar, the length of a jacket, and the shoulders of a shirt or jacket. Those are going to be challenging and expensive to have altered, so don't buy clothes that don't already fit well in those areas.

Remember, this is the base of the style pyramid and the first thing you should check any clothing you buy for. *If it won't fit with minimal adjustments, don't buy it.*

That applies equally to everything from suits on down to your underwear. A bad fit is unsightly and uncomfortable. Skip it.

## Fabric

Here we use "fabric" as a shorthand for the material and construction of the

garment overall.

The idea here is a pretty simple one: you want to buy clothes that will make you look good and that will last for years.

That sometimes requires adjusting what you think of as a "reasonable" price for clothing. The best brands are never going to compete with stores like Target or Walmart for price, but by paying a little more up front you often get a better long-term investment.

Think of it this way: if you can buy one pair of \$100 jeans that lasts the better part of a decade, you're spending less than you would buying \$30 jeans that need replacing every two years.

### *Raw Material Quality Check*

In the world of high-end custom tailoring, most bespoke suits have their prices listed based on the bolt of cloth used.

That's because the raw material is one of the most important factors influencing how a garment looks and how it holds up over time.

Unlike bespoke tailors, however, most ready-to-wear clothing brands don't list the specific weight or origin of their materials. Department stores certainly aren't going to! A man needs to acquaint himself with the look and feel of quality materials before he shops, so that he can tell the good stuff from the bad.

You don't have to know the technical data to get a sense for the quality of clothing. Run a hand over it and, whenever possible, try it on. Look for signs of good raw materials:

- a nice "drape" -- the cloth should hang straight, without wrinkles or billowing
- a smooth, even handfeel
- no bumps or rough patches (unless part of a regular, repeating weave)
- sturdiness -- the cloth shouldn't feel thin and transparent

Don't be shy about visiting some high-end menswear stores to run your hands over the good stuff. Go ahead and try on some suits and shirts that you can't afford, if you have to. It's worth having a sense for what really nice clothes are supposed to feel like.

### *Construction Quality Check*

While you're looking at the fabric, you should also make sure that the garment was put together competently.

Flip it inside out and take a look at the seams. They should be neat and even, without stray threads or irregular loops all over the place. Pull gently on them to see if the stitches loosen or stretch -- that's a sign of cheap construction, and any garment that shows it won't last very long.

Make sure basic things like zippers and buttons are sturdy and firmly attached. If they're crooked, hanging by a thread, or flimsy, it's a sure sign that the item was cheaply made with little or no quality control.

Skip items that don't meet a high standard of physical quality. This is the second step on your style pyramid, and it's just as key as the first one. Buying something that will wear out quickly is a waste of your money -- and cheap garments tend not to look as good even before they start fraying and failing.

## Fashion

The third and final step of the style pyramid is the most personal one: your individual style or fashion sense.

Once you're confident that an item fits well and is well-constructed, you have to ask yourself whether it will work in any of your "looks."

That's a subjective measure. There are no hard and fast rules here. But you should think about the other items in your wardrobe, and about the sort of "self" you try to project when you dress.

Some men think in terms of archetypes: urban cowboy, power businessman, earth child, rocker, and so on.

Other men focus on their color and complexion, or look for styles that have a cultural or national association.

There's no one right way to do it. But there *is* a need to stop and think honestly about whether or not a specific purchase is going to add to your wardrobe.

We'll talk more in the next chapter about ideas of interchangeability and how to make your wardrobe all work together. For now, just be aware of fashion as the final step in your style pyramid: you should be buying things that you like the look of.

There are a few classic pieces every man should own (we'll list those in detail in

a later chapter as well). Beyond that, define your own style, and pick clothes that fit into it. You're the one that has to wear them, after all.

## How to Use The Style Pyramid

So how does all that work in the real world?

It's very simple. Whenever you can, shop in person -- there's no substitute for actually holding, touching, and trying on a garment. Online shopping is fine for brands you know and trust (especially if they have free shipping and exchanges), but when you're looking for something new, do it in person.

Run through the same procedure for anything that catches your eye:

- Check the sizing and hold it up to get a sense for whether or not it has a hope of fitting you. If it doesn't, put it back.
- Next, check the seams and the detailing. If there are obvious failures of quality control, again, put the whole thing back and walk away.
- If it looks like it might fit and the quality is good, think about whether or not it fits into your style and your wardrobe. Are you going to wear it much? If it's going to sit in the closet unused most of the time, put it back.

Only bother with actually trying on clothes that can pass *all* of those tests.

It will make you a pickier shopper. You'll end up skipping a lot of potential purchases. And that's just fine.

The goal here is to only spend money on things that are worth it. In the modern shopping environment, that's surprisingly hard! Stick to the style pyramid, and enjoy owning clothes that actually work for you.



## CHAPTER 5: THE INTERCHANGEABLE WARDROBE

The last chapter talked about the "style pyramid," which is essentially a way to double-check your potential clothing purchases.

That's basically a triage mechanism. It's good for preventing mistakes, but it doesn't do much in the way of constructive wardrobe building.

So what should a guy who wants a better wardrobe, but who isn't sure where to begin, be focusing on?

*Interchangeability.*

It sounds more complicated than it is. An interchangeable wardrobe is exactly what the word suggests: one where you can swap different pieces in and out easily, and still have them all work reasonably well with one another.

There'll always be a few outliers. Everyone ends up with one or two beloved pieces of clothing that don't necessarily go well with a lot of other pieces. But the goal of the man just starting to expand his wardrobe should always be to buy clothing items that *work well with one another*.



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**Before You Buy: Decide What You Already Own (and Like)**

No one, no matter how badly he's been dressing, is starting with an empty wardrobe. You own *some* clothes already. (If you don't, shopping is going to be an awkward experience!)

Think about what you own that you like to wear. It may not be on the cutting edge of fashion, but at least some of it can be worked into more stylish outfits as you upgrade the rest of your wardrobe. Go through the whole collection and divide your clothes up into three piles:

- Obvious losers -- stuff that doesn't fit, is damaged beyond repair, or is so hopelessly unstylish you won't even consider wearing it. (As a basic rule of thumb, anything you haven't worn in over a year can go into this pile automatically, unless it's a very purpose-specific garment that you have solid but infrequent reasons to wear.)
- Functional but unstylish clothes that you still wear, just not as part of any coordinated look.
- Good-looking clothes that you like and want to keep in rotation.

Throw the first pile out or give it to charity. Consign the second to work clothes, or start thinking up ways to pair the unstylish pieces with better accents to make them look more deliberately stylish.

The third pile -- assuming there is one -- will be the start of your new, upgraded wardrobe. You'll want to keep those items in mind, and buy clothes that work well with them in coordinated outfits.

## **Begin Building a Solid Core**

Your "core" items are your big pieces, the ones that cover big swaths of your body: shirts, jackets, and trousers, for the most part, plus maybe a few vests and pieces of outerwear.

Build a core of simple, versatile items that go well with as many different looks as possible. Plain white dress shirts are a good example: they can be worn under matched suits for a strict business look, but they can just as easily be worn with blazers for a dress-casual look, or with jeans as functional work clothes.

In the next chapter, we look at five pieces of clothing every man should own. These are good examples of a "core" you could build (though they're hardly the be-all and end-all of wardrobe building).

The point here is to have some unflashy pieces that are sturdy, well-made, and

well-fitted. That way you have something to wear your flashy pieces with, when you start buying them.

These may feel boring at first. Buy them anyway, and buy them in good quality. If every piece in an outfit is a flashy eye-grabber, you're just going to look confused and clashing. A simple, interchangeable core wardrobe makes your style pieces infinitely more versatile. Without the basics, nicer clothes are one-trick ponies.

## Expand Your Accent Collection

Interchangeable pieces tend not to have the brightest colors or the most vivid patterns. Those things don't always play well with others, so your core won't feature much of them.

That's all right, though. That's what accent pieces are for!

"Accent" items are generally -- but not always -- smaller things like neckties, pocket squares, belts, and shoes. Anything that stands out as an eye-grabbing piece against the backdrop of your core items could be considered an accent, however; "Nantucket red" pants are a good example of a larger item that basically serves as an accent.

These are how you start transforming a handful of interchangeable core items into a wardrobe of hundreds or even thousands of looks.

It's basically a multiplication problem. If you own three interchangeable pairs of trousers, three interchangeable shirts, and three interchangeable jackets, your "core" items have twenty-seven unique combinations (three times three times three). A few of those probably won't look great, so round a bit and call it twenty to twenty-five core outfits.

Every unique accent multiplies that entire number. So if you've got three eye-catching accents, pairing them with your existing core already gives you *seventy-five unique outfits*.

In practice, it's never quite that easy. Some colors don't work with others, some styles don't mesh, some looks just don't appeal to you...you're never going to get perfect mathematical efficiency out of this system.

But you can still get an impressive range of looks with just a few small changes.

## The Power of Interchangeable Items

Let's look at two very generic pieces of clothing for an example: a pair of dark, decently-fitted jeans and a plain white dress shirt.

Those two, combined, make a single, pretty generic look. It's respectable enough for day to day purposes, most places, but it's not going to catch anyone's eye.

Now start adding accents.

Pair the shirt and jeans with a slim black belt and a pair of black brogues. Suddenly it's much dressier.

Throw on a broader, brown leather belt with a decorative buckle instead, and replace the shoes with Western boots. Now you've got the urban cowboy thing going on (a bolo tie would take it even further).

Replace those Western boots with some sleek black Chelsea boots, make the belt colored canvas with leather trim, and throw a colorful scarf around your shoulders, and suddenly you're contemporary urban, with maybe just a hint of metrosexual flamboyance.

You can go on and on like that all day, *without ever changing the jeans or the shirt*. And we haven't even brought jackets, sweaters, overcoats, and other layers into the equation yet.

That's the power of an interchangeable wardrobe, and that's what you're trying to build by starting with a good core and then adding accent pieces.

## How to Tell If Your Wardrobe is Interchangeable

Take a look at your options in the closet right now.

An "interchangeable" item, broadly speaking, is one that you can pair with at least half of the other frequently-worn items in your wardrobe.

Taking things a step forward, you want at least half the items in your wardrobe to meet that qualification. Think of it as the "half works with half" rule, if that helps.

Half your wardrobe, give or take, can be less-flexible accent pieces. There's no harm in owning some style pieces -- in fact, it's encouraged. But a good half the wardrobe should be solid, interchangeable core pieces that work with the majority of your clothes.

Don't be too strict with your rules. This isn't a delicate chemical formula. You've got some wiggle room.

But do strive for that versatile, interchangeable wardrobe. If nothing else, it makes finding two things to throw on in the morning that will look decent together really easy, even before you've had your coffee.

## CHAPTER 6: FIVE PIECES OF CLOTHING EVERY MAN SHOULD OWN

For the most part, style is an individual statement. The goal is to feel confident making your own, not to copy other men's.

That said, there are a few looks that are timeless and perfect. You shouldn't wear them every day, but you should be able to pull them off when it's called for.

We've kept this list short. There are many other items of clothing that are also excellent and awesome to own. If you bought only these items and stopped there, your wardrobe would be awfully boring (also, you wouldn't have any underwear).

But you will never regret owning at least one of each of these items. So own them.

### 1. A Really Good Pair of Jeans

Doesn't matter if you wear jeans every day or if you only own the one pair -- own a really *good* pair.

What makes a really good pair of jeans?

They should be sturdy, comfortable, and versatile. You want jeans that aren't a statement all on their own. The goal is to have pants that can be dressed up, dressed down; whatever -- they should look equally good paired with a plain white T-shirt and with a sharp-cut suit jacket. Or with both at the same time.

An ideal pair of jeans should look something like this:

- dark, neutral color -- deep indigo is classic and irreproachable
- close (but not overly tight) fit, especially in the seat and crotch
- no exaggerated taper or flare below the knee
- sits a touch lower than slacks -- just above the top of the hips is good
- no rips, fades, stains, patches, or oversized labels
- the basic four-or five-pocket arrangement
- no extreme contrast stitching or zipper/button coloring

If that sounds a little basic and neutral to you, you've got the right idea.

The goal here is relaxed elegance. Jeans should look natural and unforced. Don't overdo 'em.

Own as many pairs of crazier pants as you want. Have some pairs of beat-up, light blue work jeans for when you're actually working. All those things are fine.

But own the one nice pair as well. Spend a little more up front to get a pair you really like. You won't regret having it.

## **2. A Plain White Dress Shirt**

Like the good pair of jeans, this isn't the most exciting garment in the world. It's almost generic.

But it's also worth having.

A plain white dress shirt can be worn with anything. It's a must-have if you're wearing a suit, at least for your most formal business settings. A lightly-patterned dress shirt is fine for most workplaces, but when you need to look like serious business, pure white is your gold standard.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, the same shirt looks just fine with a beat-up pair of jeans (it's a little cowboy, but there's nothing wrong with that). And it'll work fine with cords, chinos, blazers, sports jackets -- whatever. You can even untuck it and roll the sleeves and make it work with shorts in the summer.

Stick to the basics here. Your default white shirt should have a point or a spread collar (no button-downs), simple barrel cuffs, and -- of course -- a really good fit.

Keep it clean, bleach as often as needed to get rid of stains, and press it (or have it pressed) so that the front is free of wrinkles and the collar lies flat. That way you'll always have something good-looking to wear on your upper body, no matter where you're going or what you're doing.

## **3. A Pair of Dark Leather Shoes**

Never underestimate the improvement a good pair of shoes makes on an outfit.

If you can't bring yourself to be the kind of man that owns many pairs of shoes, make sure to have at least one pair of dark leather ones in your collection.

The ideal style can vary a little depending on your needs. For strict business dress, plain black oxfords are the only option. Men who don't have much call for



business dress can get away with a more relaxed black shoe, or even a dark brown one.

The point is to own a nice pair. They may feel dressy at first, especially for men who are used to gym shoes or synthetic-material work boots, but rest assured that leather shoes dress down just fine when you pair them with jeans and a relaxed belt.

As with the other must-have items, it's worth your while to invest up front here. Get a really good pair that fits like a glove. With occasional cleaning and polishing, it'll last you for years.

#### **4. A Navy Blazer**

A stylish man will probably own half a dozen jackets or more. But *every* man should own a navy blazer.

Blazers are a versatile middle ground. They're a little dressier than casual sports jackets, but not as dressy as a suit.

That makes them a great default any time you want to look "nice" but aren't sure what statement to make beyond that. You can go to church in a blazer, you can go on a date in one; you can even appear on TV in one.

Keep your first blazer simple and elegant. The navy blue fabric color is a must; the traditional metallic buttons are optional, and can be replaced with dark-colored leather, horn, or mother-of-pearl if you prefer a lower contrast look.

The fit should be close but not too tapered -- blazers are supposed to be a touch boxier than unstructured sports jackets. Throw it on to dress up any look, and wear it with confidence to anything short of a full business dress setting.

#### **5. Gray Wool Trousers**

Of all the items on this list, gray wool trousers are probably owned by the smallest number of men.

That's unfortunate, since they're the ideal jeans alternative for most settings.

When you want to look dressier than denim can manage, you have lots of options, but few are as simple, practical, and versatile as gray wool.

The gray can vary from light to medium to charcoal dark, and the wool can be

flannel, worsted, or even a textured weave like herringbone. The requirements here aren't too specific, beyond "wool" and "gray" -- and, of course, a good fit.

Get a pair if you don't already own one. You may feel a little overdressed in them the first few times out, but you'll quickly realize that they can be worn even in very casual settings for a look that's not out of place -- but that is a little nicer than all the jeans-wearing men around you.

## **CHAPTER 7: HOW TO BUILD A WARDROBE ON A BUDGET**

One of the chief goals of this style guide was to make the information in it relevant and accessible.

A lot of fashion advice, we found, isn't, simply because it focuses so much on the higher end of things.

It's great to talk about bespoke tailoring and designer fashions with people who can afford to buy those on a regular basis, but the reality is that most guys can't. Some acknowledgement needs to be made that there are men out there who want to look sharp, but who are dressing on a budget.

So if you like the idea of looking nicer, but aren't going to be ordering custom-tailored suits any time soon, don't despair. Here are some of the best ways you can shop for menswear without breaking the bank:

### **1. Know Your Local Thrift Store (and Love It)**

Get over any prejudices you might have and embrace the concept of thrift-store shopping.



Some of your best deals are going to come from thrift stores, consignment shops,

and similar second-hand markets. The selection is a craps shoot, but the prices are good enough to justify the extra time that costs you.

Get in the habit of visiting your local thrift store (or stores) whenever you happen to pass by. If you never happen to, make a point of doing it every month or two anyway.

The results will be varied. Depending on your body type and size, you may have a wide selection that gets picked over quickly, a limited selection that no one's competing for, or something somewhere in between.

But every once in a while, no matter your size, you can expect to snag a really good bargain, and it's those moments that make thrift store shopping worthwhile. Expect to have to spend a little more on adjustments for most things you buy -- but when you've just found a \$500+ suit going for twenty bucks, the extra ten or twenty for adjustments still totals up to a pretty good deal.

## **2. E-thrift -- But Cautiously**

The internet is, in some ways, a thrift store the size of the world. If you're good at Googling and willing to put some time into it, you can find almost anything for cheap.

Unfortunately, there's no way to try clothes on via the internet. You're stuck relying on product descriptions, which can be incomplete or even falsified. And there's no way of knowing for sure until the purchase arrives on your doorstep.

That means being a little cautious when you buy second-hand clothes online. Try to stick to websites that you trust, or sellers with good reviews and reputations. See what other people are saying about a source before using it for the first time.

If sites offer extra protections or return services for members, consider registering for the membership. Ebay and Amazon are both examples of sites that give more generous return policies to members than to unregistered users.

Expect to have to return or exchange about half of what you buy online, especially when you're first starting to explore your options. Plan accordingly, and stick to websites that aren't "all sales final" unless you're *very* sure of your purchase.

## **3. Track Sales and Coupons**

Coupon-clipping is generally associated with grocery stores, but it's an option for clothing shoppers as well.

These days, you can use websites to track sales and special offers from brands you like. Sites like *Dappered.com* exist to highlight the best deals available every day.

You should also subscribe to the mailing lists of the brands or stores you like best. This will inevitably result in some offers you aren't interested in, but it'll also expose you to some deals you *do* want.

Deleting an extra e-mail or two each day isn't actually that big of a hassle. And it's well worth the effort when you're also occasionally getting big discounts on items you were going to purchase anyway -- or that you wanted to purchase, but couldn't because of the price.

#### **4. Ask for Clothing Gifts**

Take advantage of gift-giving holidays like Christmas to get the word out that you're into fine menswear these days.

Relatives and friends are often grateful for a few gift ideas that you'll actually appreciate, so that they're not guessing completely blind.

You're not likely to have many friends who are giving away custom-tailored suits (though if you do you should definitely stay friends with them!), but you can let it be known that affordable accent pieces like pocket squares, colored socks, and vintage or artistic belt buckles are right up your alley.

It's a double bonus: you get some new accent pieces for free, and you get some additions that you wouldn't necessarily have thought to buy yourself. Some of them will not quite be to your taste -- that's always a risk with gifts -- but most of the time you'll get things that are at least functional. And once in a while someone surprises you with something downright awesome.

#### **5. Borrow from Relatives**

If there are other men in your family about your size, check with them about borrowing clothes when you really need them, or about getting some hand-me-downs.

This is usually a father-son sort of thing, but brothers, cousins, and nephews/uncles can help each other out too, so long as they're about the same size.

Go with whatever arrangement comes naturally to your family. Borrow a suit for an interview if you don't have one of your own, maybe, or take a vintage suit

jacket that's seen better days out of mothballs and wear it with jeans or corduroys as a funky sports jacket.

Whatever the other men in your family aren't using -- snag it and get it back into the rotation. It's doing everybody a favor.

## 6. Spend More, Less Frequently

Try to get into the mindset of investing in two or three serious clothing purchases each year, and not much beyond that.

(If you've got the budget for more frequent purchases, of course, go for it. But men who need to save for a few months between clothing investments should focus on two or three a year.)

Make these significant, high-quality purchases. Focus on the upgrades that will do your wardrobe the most good, and spend to get the best quality you can afford.

Buying one or two really good items that are built to last will do you more good in the long term than shopping every week or two for cheap junk. Your wardrobe will be a little less varied, but you'll get more value for your dollar.

If you desperately need variety, get it with accent pieces. Things like pocket squares and unique belts are a lot cheaper than jackets and trousers, and they do just as much to change up your look.

## 7. Adjustments Are Always Worth It

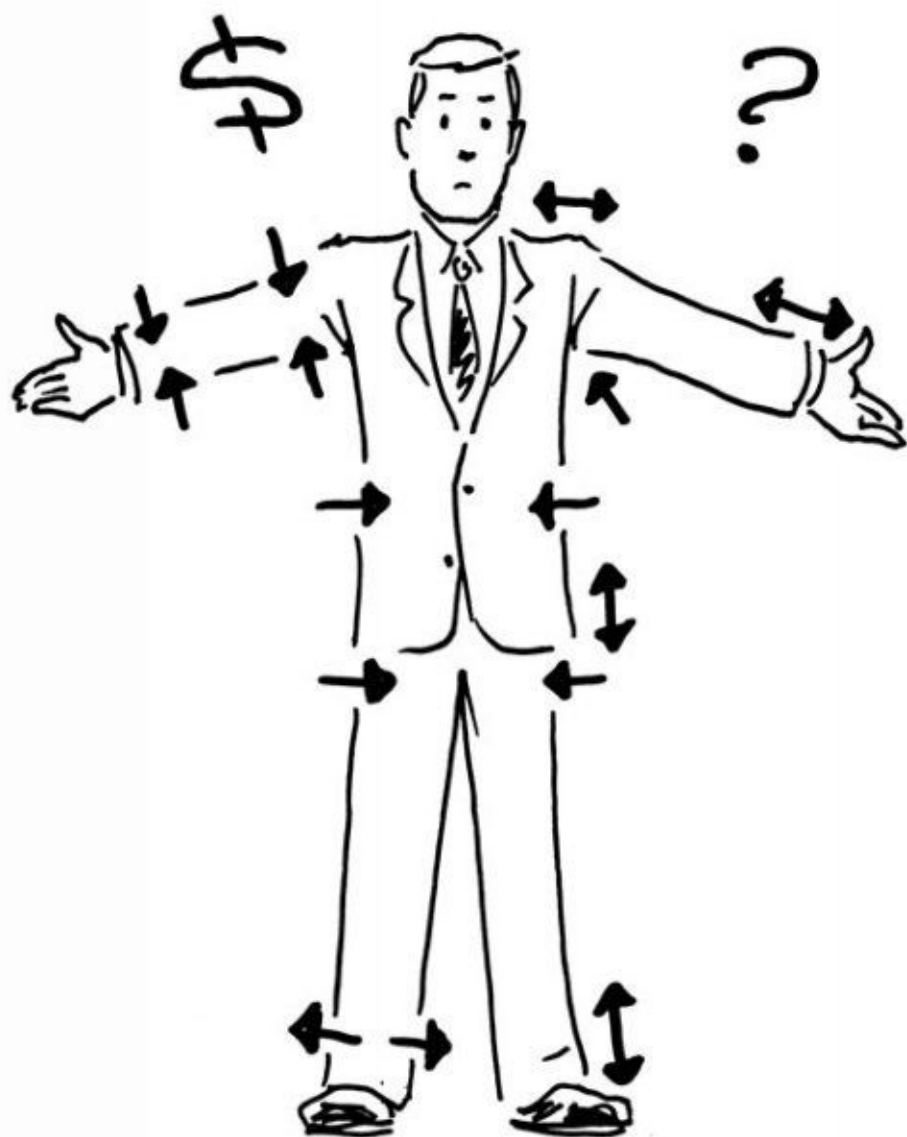
Finally, if you're doing a lot of second-hand shopping, remember that adjustments at a tailor's are *always* worth it.

Always.

Spend the \$10-20 per piece to get your wardrobe fitted to your body. Some adjustments will be very small and cheap, while others will be more costly, but all of them are worth the extra investment.

It's the difference between wearing second-hand clothing and looking like you're wearing second-hand clothing. Once the garments have been adjusted (and repaired, if needed), there's nothing to make people think they're anything less than the season's newest looks, hot off the shelves.

And that's a pretty big upgrade for a pretty low price.





## **CHAPTER 8: SHOPPING FOR YOUR BODY TYPE AND POSTURE**

Many men overlook the details of their body when they shop for clothes. In their minds, they're thinking about what looks good on men in general, not about what will flatter them specifically.

Take it one step further when you shop, and start with the styles that suit your body best.



## Styles for Short Men

The idea that short men always want to look taller is a bit insulting. You can look good without buying into airbrushed stereotypes.

That said, short men do look good in styles that streamline their body and help the viewer's eye travel easily up the length of their figure to their face.

To flatter a shorter body, look to eliminate unnecessary horizontal elements and thick, chunky details:

- Starting at the feet, avoid shoes with needless seams or decorations on the uppers. Keeping the footwear sleek and smooth on top may not seem that important, but it helps people's attention focus on the upper body rather than the feet.
- Similarly, trouser cuffs don't do anything useful for a short man. Opt for smooth hems to avoid looking chopped off at the ankles (and make sure the trousers are long enough to hide the socks completely, for the same reason).
- Belts should be kept slim and simple. Avoid anything chunky or eye-catching. Big belts cut your height right in half.
- A little patterning is fine, but avoid heavy horizontal striping or checks. You want most of the elements to be vertical.
- By the same token, avoid unnecessary horizontal elements like extra pockets on the jacket and shirt. Your upper body look should be clean and simple.

Don't feel like you have to follow each and every one of those rules to the letter. It's not impossible for a short man to look good in a plaid shirt with a breast pocket. You just want your wardrobe to generally lean toward the slimmer, sleeker, more vertical style of clothing.

## Styles for Tall Men

It should stand to reason that tall men mostly want the opposite of short men: they do well in styles that are more cluttered and that include heavier horizontal elements. That helps break up the height, reducing the impression of looming that tall men sometimes give.

Look for understated ways to break your height up without getting too aggressive about it:

- Patterned shoes help draw the eye downward. That doesn't make people stare at your feet or anything -- it just gives a little downward pull to your look, which helps balance the height out some. Brogues

work well, as do styles with visible seams on the uppers like cap toes and wingtips.

- Outside of your most formal dress trousers, there's no reason not to have cuffs on your pants. It helps cut a bit of height off at the ankles, and the extra durability is just an added bonus.
- Wider belts and larger buckles help give a solid anchor to your midsection. Like the shoes, that weights the viewer's eye down a little, keeping them from focusing on your height.
- Small horizontal elements like flap pockets clutter your look up a bit, making you less of a monolithic whole. In low-formality settings, go for a busy look.
- Horizontal patterns are fine, so long as they're not too bold. A really aggressive check or plaid on a big man is a lot of visual information all at once, so keep things simple to avoid overwhelming the people around you.

As with short men, there's no reason to make this your style gospel. Tall guys can do just fine in vertical stripes, within reason. All you're doing is avoiding extremes, and erring on the side of breaking your height up a little.

## Styles for Heavyset Men

There's a lot of advice out there for men who want to appear slimmer. Some of it's good and some of it's not.

Try not to get hung up on the idea of "slimming down." The goal is to look good, not to look like you have a different body. Simple solids, dark colors, and a clean silhouette all go a long way toward making a broad man look big and powerful, rather than out of shape.

- Jackets are the big man's friend. Wear one whenever you can! A simple dark blazer or sports jacket frames the torso and directs people's eyes up toward your face.
- Keep patterning to a minimum. Thin lines on wide scales work better than closely spaced patterns. A big body has a lot of surface area, and detailed patterns can easily look overwhelming.
- Large accents will help keep everything looking proportional. Avoid skinny belts, slim wristwatches, and insubstantial-looking pocket

squares. You want your small details to project solidity.

The goal for a heavyset dresser is to keep everything looking neat, simple, and proportional. Don't be afraid to be bold -- you've got the body to carry it off.



## Clothing and Posture

Men of any size should also keep their posture in mind when selecting clothing.

Ideally, you want your posture to be as straight as possible. The most attractive way for a man to carry himself (and there are deeply-engrained biological reasons for that attractiveness) is with his back straight, his chest forward, his chin up, and his shoulders wide and square.

If you already assume that posture naturally, you're ahead of the game. If you don't, it's worth trying to change your habits, but in the meantime you'll want to be aware of your normal posture when you shop for clothes.

Always try clothing on in your "natural" posture. That means relaxing into your default habits, rather than stiffening up and puffing your chest out for the mirror. Remember, you're not trying to impress anyone in the changing room.

This is particularly important when men are getting fitted for custom clothing or adjustments. Well-made jackets take the "pitch" of the sleeve into account: the angle at which it attaches to the shoulder and torso of the jacket. If you're artificially distorting your posture during the measurements, you're likely to get a jacket with a pitch that doesn't fit your body.

Be realistic, and shop for the body you have rather than the body you want (that's always good advice, for issues of weight gain and loss as well as posture). Work on straightening your back and shoulders -- it's good for your appearance and your health -- but be ready to take a pass on clothing if it wrinkles or distorts on your existing default posture.

## **Section 3: What to Wear and When to Wear It**



## CHAPTER 9: DRESS CODES, WRITTEN AND UNWRITTEN

There are only a few places where you're likely to see a formal dress code set down in writing.

Invitations are the most common. Workplaces may also have a "dress code," although in that case it usually means a written set of policies rather than a simple one-or two-word category like you'd see on an invitation.

That doesn't mean the concept is obsolete, however. Understanding the established dress codes as you would see them written on an invitation is a useful shorthand for knowing how people are expected to dress in other social and professional situations as well.

Different lists will include slightly different terms, but broadly speaking, the scale of men's dress codes (from most formal to least) looks about like this:

- Formal Dress - a rarely-used standard for the most formal events
- Semiformal Dress - the typical modern default for high-formality events
- Business Dress - the standard for suit-and-tie workplaces and meetings
- Business Casual - a broad, relaxed code designed to be less formal than suits
- Casual - the catch-all category for "undress" social and work wear

Most of the time, you won't be attending an event under a written requirement to wear one of these things. But you'll still probably fit into one of the categories anyway. For most men, it'll usually be casual or business casual.

The advantage of written dress codes is that they give you a "gold standard" example of what that level of formality should look like when it's done as well as possible. In everyday life most men will add a little variety and deviate from the standard -- it's just there as a useful marker or guideline.

There will also be outliers and special situations that don't fall neatly into any of the written dress codes. Social suits are a great example -- they're too light and colorful to be business-appropriate, but to modern eyes they still seem "dressier"

than a business-casual blazer and khakis would.

Uniforms and task-specific work clothes like a shopkeeper's apron or a factory worker's coveralls also fall outside of the concept of formal dress codes. They're required, but they're not a fashion statement.

So don't hold too close to the concept of dress codes. But be aware that you're usually following one, whether you think you are or not -- and don't be afraid to "overdress" a little when there's no fixed code.

Unless you're violating a specific, written expectation or you're wildly out of place, there's no error in being the best-dressed guy in the room. It's allowed. It's even a good thing.

There are going to be exceptions. You probably don't want to wear a really expensive jacket and slacks to volunteer at a soup kitchen -- that's just rude. But broadly speaking, if there's no formal dress code, that means you can't be "overdressed." All you can be is "well-dressed," and that's never a bad thing.

## CHAPTER 10: FORMAL DRESS (MORNING DRESS AND WHITE TIE)

A caution for modern readers: the term "formal dress" is badly misused in today's society.

Wedding invitations are the chief offenders here. People will cheerfully request that their guests appear in "formal dress" with *no* conception of what they're asking.

So let us be very clear: the term "formal dress" is a specific standard. There are two traditional formal looks for men, at least in countries that do not have their own cultural formal dress: "morning dress" in the daytime and "white tie" at night. *Anything else is not truly "formal."*

Even the tuxedo, which most Americans think of as "formal wear," is really only a semiformal outfit. If invited to an official event like an awards ceremony or a ball that requests formal dress, wear the appropriate daytime or evening costume. If it is a private, personal event like a wedding, and you are unsure of the host's intention, check discreetly beforehand.

### Daytime Formal Attire: Morning Dress

Of the two "formal dress" options available to most men, the daytime version is the less commonly used.

It is most popular in England, where it is still worn by government officials at some of their public functions, and occasionally by members of the aristocracy at high-formality social events.

The primary components of morning dress for men are:

- *A morning coat* -- a single-breasted, peak-lapel cutaway coat, usually fastened with a single button, sometimes with silk piping along the edges. Gray is the most common color for social wear.
- *Formal trousers* -- striped (or, less commonly, checked) trousers from heavy wool. They generally do not match the morning coat, except in the "Morning Gray" suit sometimes worn for daytime weddings and in black for funerals. They are sometimes known as "spongebags" or as "cashmere stripes," the latter of which refers to the pattern rather

than the material. Only suspenders are appropriate; formal and semiformal attire should never include a belt.

- A *waistcoat* -- generally gray, black, or buff (a yellowish-tan color). Again, it does not match the jacket except in gray morning suits or black funeral garb.
- A *formal shirt* with a high wing collar or a detachable turndown collar attached with studs. In formalwear, wing collared shirts traditionally have single cuffs, while turndown shirts have double cuffs.
- A conservative necktie (with turndown collars) or a *formal ascot* (with wing collars). Note that a formal ascot is *not* the same thing as a day cravat, which is not worn with morning coats.
- Black oxfords, riding boots, or dress boots.

Other optional items include pocket squares, boutonnieres, canes, top hats (the only kind of hat that should be worn with morning dress), spats, and suede, chamois, or kid leather gloves in lemon or gray.

Note that these are the contemporary, modern standards for daytime formalwear. Historically, even the morning coat was a casual option, with the now-obsolete frock coat worn for formal daytime occasions.

## Evening Formal Attire: White Tie

The morning coat or morning suit, as the name would suggest, is meant for daytime wear.

In the evening, the maximum dress standard for men is defined by *white tie* attire. This is an inflexible standard even compared to the tuxedo, which most men already think of as a strict dress code.

Resist any temptation to play around with this one. Most men will never wear it, and if you find yourself called upon to do so, stick to the classic standards:

- An *evening tailcoat* -- double-breasted but worn unbuttoned, with peak lapels faced in satin or grosgrain. Black and midnight blue are the only appropriate colors, and the cutaway is straight rather than angled or swooped.
- *Formal trousers* that match the material of the tailcoat, with stripes

along the seam made from the same material as the lapel facings. Only suspenders are appropriate; formal and semiformal attire should never include a belt.

- A *waistcoat* made of white pique, single-or double-breasted with oblong lapels and long enough to cover the trouser waist fully.
- A *wing-collared formal shirt* with a stiff front placket, single cuffs fastened with links, and only one or two front studs (sometimes three for very tall men)
- A white *bowtie*, generally made of pique to match the waistcoat. Either batwing or butterfly shapes are acceptable, but should always be hand-tied.
- Black *dress pumps*, a formal type of slip-on shoe. Plain black oxfords can be substituted in a pinch, ideally ones made from patent leather. If plain calf oxfords are your only option, polish them to a very high shine for white tie wear.

## Cultural Alternatives

Some countries may have their own native alternative to morning dress and white tie for a man's most formal clothing option.

Famous examples include Scottish formal dress (which includes a kilt and sporran for men), the Icelandic *hátiðarbúningur*, and the Philippine *barong Tagalog*.

Traditional cultural garments are also sometimes made in more elaborate forms to create a *de facto* formalwear, such as the decorated *dhoti* and *kimono* sometimes worn at Indian and Japanese formal events.

If you belong to a culture that acknowledges an alternative to morning dress, you are of course free to wear it (even outside its native country). Men who are not native to the culture, however, should be wary of unwanted appropriation, and only wear such garments when expressly invited to, or when given them as gifts in preparation for a specific event.

There are also a few situations where uniforms may be worn in place of white tie or morning dress. High-formality military balls sometimes request dress uniforms of active servicemen and servicewomen, and formal dress of all other attendees.

Apart from those exceptions, however, formal dress is a strict standard and should be treated as such. On the rare occasion that a man is invited to a formal affair, he should either have proper attire made for him, or else he should arrange a high-quality rental well in advance.

## CHAPTER 11: SEMIFORMAL DRESS (STROLLERS AND BLACK TIE/TUXEDO)

In the previous chapter, we discussed true formal dress.

That's an extremely high standard that men are rarely called upon to wear anymore. Most men go their whole lives without ever needing to put on morning dress or white tie attire.

Semiformal occasions are a little more common. Black tie is a popular enough wedding attire that many men end up at least renting a tuxedo once or twice in their lives.

Unfortunately, that's also led to some dilution of the standard, especially at large commercial rental outlets. These days, simply being labeled as a "tuxedo" doesn't necessarily make an outfit black tie.

Additionally, like formal wear, semiformal wear has a daytime standard as well as a nighttime standard, making black tie inappropriate before around 5:00 in the evening (give or take -- the general rule of thumb is, if the event will *end* after dark, you can wear a tuxedo even if the sun is still up at the *start* of the event).

If you're going to dress for a semiformal event, take the time to do it right. Wear the appropriate attire for the time of day, and stick to the standard rather than branching out into something that's more of a costume based on formalwear than true semiformal dress.

### Daytime Semiformal Attire: Strollers

The "stroller" is a type of coat, and its name is generally given to the whole traditional outfit worn with it as well. Both the term and the fashion are most common in the United States. In the United Kingdom (and countries influenced by UK styles), most daytime events are either treated as formal or business affairs, with no need for a middle ground.

The stroller looks similar to men's formal daytime attire, and most modern men won't be able to tell the two apart at a glance. The main differences are the color and length of the coat. Essential components include:

- A *stroller* or *Stresemann* jacket -- black, single-or double-breasted, and tailless, made from heavy wool and usually with peaked lapels.

They tend to be a touch longer and more squared-off than modern suit jackets, but do not have the long tails of a morning coat.

- *Formal trousers* in light gray. Solid, striped, or checked are all acceptable, though the stripes and checks should be a subdued, gray-on-gray pattern. As with formal attire, only suspenders are appropriate -- never a belt.
- A *waistcoat* in gray, black, or buff.
- A *formal shirt* with a detachable, turndown collar (never a wing collar). The front should fasten with studs, not buttons, and the cuffs should be single and fasten with links.
- A *gray or silver necktie* (never an ascot or cravat).
- Black Oxfords, dress boots, or riding boots.

Most of this style is interchangeable with morning dress. The main difference is the jacket and the shirt collar/necktie combination. In most countries that wear it (the United States, Germany, and Japan are the places where it is most common), semiformal daytime attire evolved as a slightly more convenient version of its formal cousin, and has remained largely unchanged ever since.

### **Evening Semiformal Attire: Black Tie**

Black tie attire calls for a tuxedo jacket, but not all tuxedos are black tie.

Sounds complicated, no?





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Mostly it comes down to the quality of the tux and the other items you wear it with. For true black tie, everything should be black and white, with the possible exception of a single small, colored accent like a boutonnière.

Other than that, the "dinner suit," as black tie is sometimes called, is not actually all that different from a modern business suit. It is largely a matter of accessories, materials, and precision that turns it into a higher dress standard.

For true black tie, the following are all required:

- *A tuxedo jacket* -- a black or midnight blue wool jacket with satin or grosgrain facing on the lapels. Lapels should be peaked or shawl collared (notch lapel tuxedos exist, but are an awkward-looking modernization best avoided). The jacket can be single-or double-breasted, with single-button, single-breasted models the most traditional style.
- *Dinner suit trousers* -- matched to the tuxedo jacket, with the same base material, and the material used for the lapel facing sewn along the trouser streams in wide stripes (called "braids"). The trousers are uncuffed and should only be worn with suspenders, never with belts.
- A black *waistcoat* or *cummerbund*, both equally acceptable. Avoid colored versions of either -- restrained, dark-colored cummerbunds are *occasionally* acceptable, but unless the wearer is very sure of himself it's always better to keep semiformal evening wear black and white.
- *A black tie shirt* -- plain white, with a turndown collar and a pleated or pique front panel and double cuffs. Studs and links should be used to fasten the shirt. Wing collars are not black tie appropriate, and should be avoided.
- *A black bowtie* made of the same material as the lapel facings and trouser braid. Self-tied is the only appropriate option, never clip-on.
- *Dress pumps* or highly-polished black calf Oxfords.

In tropical climates or warm weather, it is acceptable to substitute a white, self-faced jacket paired with a black cummerbund. Beyond that, colored jackets, cummerbunds, waistcoats, *etc.* should be avoided.

## CLASSIC BLACK TIE

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## Confusions About "SemiFormal" Dress Codes

Of all the terms out there for standards of dress, semiformal (in its hyphenated and unhyphenated versions) is probably the most frequently misused.

The confusion arises from people's perception of a dinner suit as "an outfit that is formal," which leads them to conclude that it is formalwear, and that semiformal must perforce be more relaxed.

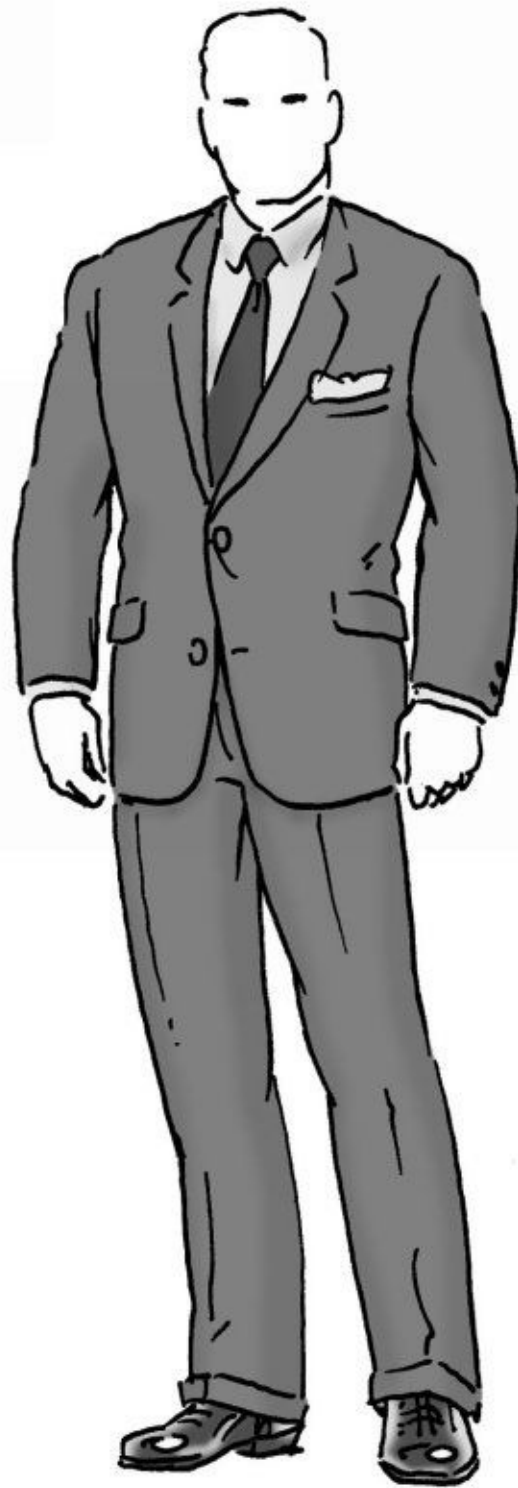
It is not uncommon for people to say "semiformal" on invitations when they really mean "black tie optional" (where the main participants will be wearing black tie, but guests may substitute a simple, dark business suit). In some cases it may even be misapplied to still more relaxed events, where guests will be wearing dress casual attire.

Be cautious when all you have to go on is an invitation, particularly to privately-planned and privately-hosted events. If your state Senator is holding a "semiformal" dinner, he or she probably means it; your cousin or your best friend from high school may not be quite as on-target. Enquire discreetly of the hosts or someone who worked with them on the planning if there's any confusion.

## CHAPTER 12: BUSINESS DRESS

Despite the name, most of the world doesn't wear "business dress" to do their professional work.

The term refers to matched suits worn with neckties, which are only the default attire in a fairly small and influential chunk of the population. It is the go-to uniform in a few highly-paid fields like finance and law, and beyond that is mostly used for infrequent events where a high degree of formality is called for (like ceremonies, court dates, and presentations).



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## Strict Business Dress: The Gold Standard

Business suits come in a wide variety of colors and styles. They can also be worn a number of ways, with varying accessories.

We'll start this section with a description of *strict* business dress. This is the business suit at its most formal: the outfit you wear when you need to look as serious and professional as possible.

The best business suits will meet all of the following standards:

- At least 98% high-quality wool (worsted is the most common)
- A single solid, dark color (charcoal gray, navy blue, or black)
- A single-or double-breasted jacket
- Notch or peak lapels
- Jetted pockets
- No trouser cuffs

Obviously, everything should be in good quality, and the fit should be tailored specifically to your body (whether that means from-scratch bespoke construction, made-to-measure, or alterations to an off-the-rack suit is largely up to your budget and preferences).

The following items should be worn with your suit for strict business dress:

- A plain white dress shirt (point or spread collar -- not button-down)
- A dark-colored necktie (a bit of conservative patterning is fine)
- A plain white pocket square in a horizontal or peak fold
- Plain black balmoral oxfords
- Socks in the same color as the suit trousers (or close to it)
- A black leather belt with a small metal buckle (alternatively, suspenders)
- A business watch (metal/leather should match your belt/shoes)

Resist the temptation to play fast and loose with any of these accents. In other, slightly more relaxed business settings, go for it. But when you want the crispest, strictest form of "business dress" possible, stick to plain, solid colors everywhere

but the necktie. Keep the accent items (watch, belt, etc.) slim and restrained, and any visible edges (like the fold of the pocket square and the shirt collar) crisp and straight.



I'M IN  
CHARGE  
HERE!



## Typical Business Dress

The above description will work great when you're presenting before the board of directors, or giving closing arguments in court, or interviewing for a high-powered position.

Most of the rest of the time, even men whose jobs do require and expect business suits won't need the ultra-crisp, inflexible simplicity of strict business attire.

For basic, day-to-day business attire, the required *items* stay the same: matched suit, dress shirt, necktie, and leather shoes/belt. But the color, pattern, and texture options open up quite a bit, as do some of the tailoring details.

To qualify as a business suit rather than a social one, a suit still needs to meet some basic standards:

- traditional single-or double-breasted jacket (no unusual button arrangements)
- light patterning (pinstripes, gray-on-gray check, etc.) or solid color
- no exaggerated features (oversized lapels, etc.)
- wool or cotton (no cheap synthetics, and save linen for summer social events)

The main goal here is to avoid wearing anything that's so flamboyant or unique that it becomes its own conversation piece. You can express your individuality a bit, but at the end of the day you should still look like someone who works in an office and wears a suit to work.

Just how much uniqueness you're allowed to express will depend on your workplace. Start out conservative until you've got a good feel for things, and then broaden your collection if you find yourself in need of more suits.

Similar to the suit, your options for other clothes open up somewhat, but stay in the same basic family:

- light-colored or lightly-patterned dress shirts
- neckties (nothing novelty or in clashing colors)
- pocket squares (colored is fine, but never matching the tie exactly)
- dark leather shoes (any dressy style is fine, but monochrome only -- no two-tones)

- socks can match the trouser or be a deliberate, colorful contrast
- leathers and metals can vary, but should match throughout the outfit

As you can see, there's a lot more room for expression here.

The same dark suit can become two or three different outfits, just by changing up the style and color of your shoe/belt combination or your choice of necktie and pocket square.

What you don't want to do is try to push the actual boundaries of "business dress" by wearing suits that are too casual or too fashion-forward. Things that are obviously old-fashioned "sporting" styles (think hairy, earth-tone tweeds) or contemporary catwalk fashions (bright colors, unstructured jackets, thin cotton or synthetic fabrics, etc.) aren't good business wear, unless you're in the business of hunting grouse or shooting magazine spreads.

## **Relaxed Business Dress**

It's splitting hairs a bit, but there's an argument to be made that a matched business suit worn with non-traditional accompaniments becomes a relaxed form of business dress that deserves its own category.

This can take a couple different forms. The most common is the basic business suit and dress shirt, worn without a necktie (and sometimes with the top placket button unfastened). You'll see politicians wearing this look a lot during their less-formal public appearances -- it keeps the authority of the suit, but looks more friendly and approachable.

Other variations are based around national costumes. Many South and Central American business and political leaders wear the traditional guayabera shirt under their suits instead of dress shirts, for example, while some South Asian and Middle Eastern men wear Western-style jackets and ties over skirt-like lower pieces (which go by many names, depending on language, including izaar, futah, sarong, lungi, and more).

These variations are usually assumed to be less appropriate for high-formality occasions like presentations and ceremonies, but can often pass muster for basic day-to-day business wear.

## CHAPTER 13: BUSINESS CASUAL

If you read the last three chapters straight through in one sitting (we told you not to do that at the start of the book, you know), you might be feeling a little overwhelmed right now.

Dress codes at the highest levels of formality are strict, specific, and no-nonsense. That makes competence with them very attractive, but also a little nerve-wracking for beginners.

Fortunately, we're out of the woods at this point.

The vast, broad dress code called "business casual" isn't really a fixed code at all. It's more a minimum and a maximum standard, between which people are free to do anything that isn't too aggressively *outré*.

### Business Casual: The Maximum Standard

The main, key feature of business casual is that it's *not business dress*.

That means you're not wearing a suit.

Put an asterisk on that if you really want to -- there are a few casual suits that could be worn, open-collared, in a business casual work setting. But most are designed either for business dress or for social wear, so keep it simple and avoid suits when your goal is "business casual."

So what do you wear instead?

The options run a wide gamut from just slightly less formal than a suit on down to very casual-seeming outfits. At the top end, you're looking at something like this:

- A dark navy blazer, single-or double-breasted
- Gray wool slacks
- A white (or white with light patterning) dress shirt
- A dark, conservative necktie
- Black leather dress shoes
- Socks to match the slacks

- A slim, black leather belt with a small metal buckle
- A dress watch (leather/metal should match the belt)

As you've probably already noticed, this is just business dress with the suit removed and an unmatched blazer and trousers put in its place. Pretty much everything else is the same.

It's a popular look for men who want to appear respectable but relaxed. Slacks and a blazer are sometimes called "the California suit," as a nod to the West Coast's famously laid-back dress standards.

Keep in mind that, by business casual standards, the outfit described above is pretty formal. It's as high as you want to go. Most of the time you'll want to dress more relaxed than that.

We'll cover the minimum standard in a moment -- just remember that the blazer, slacks, white shirt, and necktie is as formal as you want to go in a dress-casual environment. Beyond that, you're pushing on up into business dress.

(There are sometimes reasons to exceed the going standard of course. Just be aware when you're doing it, and have a reason for it.)



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## **Business Casual: The Minimum Standard**

We mentioned that this was a broad "code," so broad it can hardly be considered a single look at all.

So what does the most casual end of business casual look like?

This has changed over the last decade or two. There used to be a hard and fast answer that jeans, at least, were right out -- that gave you some sort of standard. But these days, "dressy" jeans of the dark, close-fitted sort are tolerated and even explicitly allowed in some business casual workplaces.

So let's grant that jeans are, sometimes and conditionally, allowed. But it's something you have to weigh carefully. If you want a minimum standard for a business casual level of formality that you don't have to think about, it looks something like this:

- A collared dress shirt or polo, solid color or relatively modestly patterned
- Khakis, chinos, or other cotton slacks in a plain, drab color
- Brown or black leather shoes (rubber soles are fine, but the uppers should be leather)
- Socks to match the slacks
- A belt to match the shoes

A necktie isn't required just by the words "dress casual" or "business casual," but many workplaces will mandate a tie in their own internal dress guidelines.

People play pretty fast and loose with the idea of business casual these days. It's not out of the question to see things like jeans or sandals, which would once have been considered strictly non-professional attire, worn in business casual settings, especially within the tech industry.

Just like the maximum standard we described above, feel free to wear this minimum standard anywhere that dress casual is the order of the day. But don't drop below it, and be aware that you're pushing the limits of how casual you can go.

## **Business Casual: Finding the Middle Ground**

Between those two extremes -- the khakis-and-open-collar look and the blazer-

and-necktie look -- lies a wide range of options.

Generally speaking, if you're in a dress casual environment, you want to be somewhere in that happy middle ground.





There are countless ways to achieve that. Stay away from things that are too

formal (suits, very stiff blazers, etc.), too casual (jeans, Tshirts, etc.), or too clearly designed for social situations rather than business (brightly-colored or loudly-striped shirt patterns, for example, even on a collared dress shirt).

Anything else is fair game. Here are just a smattering of common approaches and items used in making "business casual" a comfortable and varied look for men:

- Blazers and sports jackets -- throw 'em on over anything to sharpen up the look a little. It adds a lot of "dress" to your "casual."
- Sweaters -- for when a jacket feels too formal, and a shirt on its own feels too bland.
- Vests -- don't try to wear the waistcoat from an old three-piece suit on its own (too much of a "thrift store" look to be professional), but a sweater vest is just fine.
- Neckties -- even if they're optional, you can always throw one on to jazz an outfit up. Bow ties work too, so long as they're not formal or semiformal white tie/black tie versions.
- Pocket squares -- never underestimate how much snappier a unique pocket square makes a blazer or a sports jacket.
- Belts -- vary it up. Canvas, leather, woven braids, whatever. A couple of sturdy leather belts that can swap buckles in and out are a good starting place.
- Shoes -- again, vary the choices here. A good pair of leather shoes upgrades a "meh" outfit in a major way. Spend a little more to have some unique options. Stick to leather uppers, though; canvas and rubber aren't work-appropriate.

Smaller accents like wristwatches and your selection of outerwear can help liven up a look as well.

Think of dress casual as the place to make an interchangeable wardrobe shine: combine some good, simple core pieces like khakis and lightly-patterned dress shirts with brighter, more unique accent pieces to keep your look varied.

You've got a lot of options here. The key is just to keep "business" fixed in your mind as well as "casual." Most men, if they go wrong with business casual, do it by incorporating casual pieces that are meant for evenings out, or daytime social

wear -- a slightly different look that we discuss in the very next chapter!

## CHAPTER 14: "SHARP CASUAL" FOR SOCIAL SITUATIONS

At this point the comforting rules of strict dress codes have been thoroughly abandoned.

You're on your own in the woods -- but don't worry; we've got a map for you.

Like business casual, which we dressed in the previous chapter, "sharp casual" is less of a set of specific rules, and more of a general aesthetic with a few set boundaries.

There's no one gold standard to adhere to here. It's not even a term you're ever likely to see on an invitation -- no one's going to yell at you for showing up in just plain old "casual" when they wanted you in "sharp casual."

Rather, we're talking about the idea of looking a little dressed-up even when you're on your own time here. That means you actually have two concrete goals:

1. Look dressed up, or at least nicely dressed, and
2. Look like you're on your own time, i.e., not dressed for work.

Some men may not see the last one as strictly necessary. And indeed, there's nothing *wrong* with wearing the same slacks and dress shirts you wear to your job for social situations as well.

The idea of sharp casual is largely there for guys who actively like dressing to stand out. You can't really do that much in a business setting without straining the bounds of professionalism, hence the evolution of a slightly more flamboyant alternative to business casual.

### The Difference Between "Business Casual" and "Sharp Casual"

Because the two dress codes (and we use the term lightly) are so similar, the line between "business casual" and "sharp casual" is a blurry one.

In fact, virtually all of the clothes that work for one will work for the other. It's more about how you're putting them together, plus a few exceptions that won't work for work wear because they're too flamboyant.

Broadly speaking:

- *Business casual* is less formal than suits, more formal than jeans and

a T-shirt, and always work-appropriate.

- *Sharp casual* is less formal than suits, more formal than jeans and a T-shirt, and could be work-appropriate but doesn't have to be.

That's pretty much your big difference there. The rest is all just details.



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## How to Make a Look Separate from Your Work Wear

To make a sharp casual look for social situations, take whatever existing business casual wear you have and ratchet up the colors and patterns a little.

Dress shirts are a really good place to do this: if the colors and patterns are bold, the shirt pretty much says "not meant for corporate office work, no siree." Throw that on with the same slacks and jackets you wear to work and you're good.

Casual sports jackets in plaids, tweeds, and other aggressive patterns and textures can also look more easy-going and less like work wear, helping to set apart any outfit they're worn with. Brightly-colored pants (not for the faint of heart) achieve the same results, a little more dramatically.

The key here is not to overdo it.

A little color goes a long way. The same goes for patterns and even large-scale textures and weaves.

Have one or maybe two pieces that "pop" a bit more than you could get away with at work. Keep the rest basically work-appropriate, and let those few statement pieces do the work of telling people that you haven't just come from the office.

## The "Sharp" in "Sharp Casual"

So what makes this any different from just plain ol' normal clothes you wear to run errands or go about your daily life in?

Not much, really, except that most men don't try to look attractive when they're going about their personal business.

If you're making an effort -- if your goal is for people to notice you and think "yeah, he's dressed nicely" -- then you're probably in the realm of sharp casual, rather than just casual.

That "sharp" usually manifests itself as extra pieces or a higher quality of clothing: a nice jacket thrown over an ordinary shirt, or dark, close-fitted jeans instead of faded work jeans.

A noticeable, visible, extra effort beyond the bare minimum that puts you up on a par with business casual, but doesn't strictly adhere to a subdued office style -- that's "sharp casual" in a nutshell.

## CHAPTER 15: WORK CLOTHES (DRESSING WELL FOR MANUAL LABOR)

"Style" and "manual labor" do not usually go together in the same sentence.

Even professional tailors and fashionable writers will usually lump work clothes together as a utilitarian category, completely separate from the world of men's style.

That's not necessarily a good idea.

### The Case for Style in Working Men's Clothes

Here's the thing about guys who work with their hands: most of them are working for someone else.

Maybe that's a boss; maybe that's a contracting company. A few lucky guys might be self-employed and own their own businesses, but even in that case they're working the clients that hire their business.

There are times when it's useful to impress that person for whom you're working.

Should that come at the expense of safety, or even practicality? No.

But *when there's no harm in it*, working class men benefit from dressing their look up a touch just as much as anyone else.

And the best part is that a little goes a very long way here -- in a world of guys in paint-stained Tshirts and grubby jeans and overalls, someone in clean blue jeans and a polo shirt with the company logo stands out just as much as a high-powered lawyer with a custom-tailored suit stands out from the Men's Wearhouse shoppers in his courtroom.





## A Stylish Working Look

Making your work wear look sharp is a matter of small upgrades.

Take every item in your default outfit that doesn't serve an irreplaceable safety function, and think about how you can kick it up one small notch.

In some cases this can be as simple as making sure you've got a good fit and clean fabric. Here are a few examples of small, easy upgrades that won't ruin an outfit's functionality:

- Blue jeans -- go with a dark shade of blue and spend a little more to get ones that fit nicely, even if your work is going to stain them. Then

keep 'em as clean as you can, and bust out a fresh pair (or some khakis) when you're holding meetings or doing other non-manual labor.

- Tshirts -- upgrade to a button-fronted work shirt (short-or long-sleeved) with a soft turndown collar. Polo shirts are a slightly dressier option, if you're not worried about getting them dirty. If you run your own business, throw a company logo on there.
- Belts -- sturdy brown leather always looks more impressive than nylon webbing. Same goes for tool pouches and the like.
- Shoes/Boots -- go with rubber-soled, leather uppers work boots or work shoes. It's fine if they're scuffed up from work, but just like with the belt, leather looks a heck of a lot better than colored synthetic fabrics.

All of these upgrades will still function in a hands-on, physical work environment. They're a little more expensive to replace than plainer versions, but they're not any less useful.

## When to Upgrade the Working Look

So when is it worth wearing slightly nicer clothes for manual labor?

Basically, when there's a concrete benefit in it for you. If it's just you and your work crew, hidden away somewhere, there's not much point. But you might consider going for a sharper style if anyone's going to be watching or evaluating you -- clients, bosses, potential customers, *etc.*

When you *shouldn't* bother is when it would actually impact your work, or make you look less prepared for it.

Because don't get us wrong -- you look better in clean, dark jeans and a polo than you do in overalls and a T-shirt. But if you're showing up to paint houses, and you know you're going to get covered in spills, wearing anything but your grubbiest and cheapest clothes makes you look wasteful and foolish.

So use some common sense. When you're mostly going to be walking, lifting things, measuring, testing, and doing other things that are hands-on but not dangerous or grubby, dress the look up a little. When there are environmental factors that could harm you or your clothing, forget about fashion and wear what works.

And when it comes time for a meeting, a project proposal, or something else that takes place in an office, rather than a job site, go ahead and throw a collared shirt and a sports jacket on. Can't hurt -- might help.

## CHAPTER 16: DRESSING YOUR AGE

Should style change as a man ages?

In one sense, it doesn't matter if you think it "should" or not. A man's fashion is *going* to change, by virtue of his role in life and his budget, whether he wants it to or not.

Over a long enough lifespan, you'll also see fashion standards change fairly dramatically -- think about what twenty—somethings tend to wear today, versus what they wore fifty years ago. Plenty of men who were twenty in 1963 are still around, and they've seen a lot of change since then!

So to some extent you have no choice. But it's also worth a man's while to think about his age and how he can dress to flatter it specifically. Some looks just work better with a young face, or with gray hairs.

### Men's Style - In Your Teens and 20s

The first adult years are generally not a time of custom clothing and high fashion, apart from a lucky few born into wealth.

Most men are going to spend their teens and 20s wearing whatever they can afford. That generally improves as the age range wears on -- guys in their late 20s typically have a lot more disposable income than guys in their early 20s, though there are obviously plenty of exceptions there.

A few things to keep in mind for dressing as a young man:

- In professional settings, it's better to overdress than not. Wear jackets and collared shirts a lot, and make sure you have good leather shoes. You're a lot harder to dismiss as some punk kid when you're dressed like an older gentleman.
- In your personal life, on the other hand, this is the time of life when you can be most experimental. Play around with different looks until you find the styles that suit you best. It's much less embarrassing to have a fashion experiment go wrong on you when you're 20 than it is when you're 50.
- Once you're out of college, ditch the styles associated with campus life. Hoodies with lettering and logos should vanish from your

wardrobe, and you want to be pretty careful with things like jeans and flannels as well.

This is a time of transition, so make your changes as gradually as you need to -- but be focused on making them. Don't be complacent. Be adding to and improving your look now, so that you're not scrambling to dress your age a few years down the line.



**Men's Style - In Your 30s**

Traditionally, we think of men in their 30s as being men who are settling down into their places in life.

How true that is these days is sort of up for debate. The "traditional" model of manhood is hardly the only way of doing things. But no matter what you're doing with your life, your 30s is still not a bad time to be projecting an air of stability, or at least dependability.

You're ready to stop being treated like a kid at this point. Your clothes should reflect that.

Don't be afraid to make some significant fashion changes as you hit your 30s and age through them:

- Do a thorough wardrobe cleanse and get rid of graphic Tshirts, hoodies, and anything else that just screams "college kid." You can keep an item or two for nostalgia (or irony), but they should be out of your regular clothing rotation for good.
- While you're at it, start pitching or adjusting anything that doesn't already have a custom fit. Again, a couple old favorites that hang sort of loose aren't a problem, but most of your wardrobe should be adjusted to fit you at this point.
- Invest in a few real wardrobe expenses. A couple pairs of high-quality leather shoes, some fashionable blazers; whatever strikes your fancy -- just have a few items that you're really happy with, even if it means spending a little more up front.
- Own at least one dark, business-appropriate suit, even if you don't need to wear it for your line of work. At this point in your life you're going to start getting invited places where you should really be wearing a decent suit, at least once in a while.

The 30-something man's wardrobe isn't really that different from the 20-something man's -- just a little more focused, a little better fitted, and maybe a little less varied now that you know the looks that work for you.

## **Men's Style - In Your 40s**

A man's 40s are when the "you're not a kid anymore" thing really needs to be taken seriously.

No matter how well you've aged, no one's going to mistake you for a wild young

buck in your 40s, and you don't want to give the impression that you're trying.

Instead, your 40s are the years to start cultivating a more refined style. Dress yourself a little nicer, spend a little more on clothes, and work on building a collection that's going to last, if not the rest of your life, at least a good chunk of it.

Rather than radically changing your style from your earlier years, work on making improvements in quality throughout your 40s:

- Add a couple really nice, built-to-last core pieces. Suits, shirts, shoes, outerwear, watches...whatever you're buying, buy it a little nicer than you're used to. Make a conscious effort to ratchet up the *quality* of the brands and materials you're buying.
- If you never have, go ahead and get something custom-made just for you. If you can't afford bespoke, go made-to-measure. It's still an amazing difference compared to basic off-the-rack stuff.
- Diversify your non-core wardrobe a little. Try out some new styles of shoe, for example, or of coats and jackets. Add accents you've never tried before. These don't have to be big changes -- just look over your style, think about what it's missing, and shake things up a little. You don't want to get *too* set in your ways.

This is a good age to be upgrading, refining, and personalizing your style. Be classy -- you're not a kid anymore -- but have a little fun with it.





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## Men's Style - In Your 50s

Ah, the 50s. Not retirement age, for most of us, but certainly moving toward thinking-about-retirement age, at the very least.

This is actually an interesting age, from a fashion standpoint. You don't want to be dressing like a young man, but you also don't want to signal to people that you're past your prime. It can be a delicate balancing act.

If you have a key word for style in your 50s, it should be *elegance*. This is the age when you want to look refined, confident, and in charge, without pushing to achieve it.

Key things to look for in your wardrobe when you're past 50:

- Invest in richness of color and texture. Go ahead and buy the good stuff, if you can afford it. There's a startling amount of difference between a high-quality Italian wool and whatever they're using this week at Men's Wearhouse. The drape of the fabric and the way the color sinks in are striking in a way that no fashion statement can be, if you get the right stuff.
- Extend that philosophy of quality to your smaller items, too. Never underestimate the power of a really good hat or even just a rich wool scarf to put your look ahead of everyone else's.
- Start thinking about upscale, sophisticated-looking styles. If you have to wear a suit, for example, consider a double-breasted or three-piece instead of the basic single-breasted model.

Depending on your career path, these may well end up being the most powerful and influential years of your life. It's worth dressing to reflect that.

## Men's Style - In Your 60s and Up

Our society is not kind to old age.

Men in their 60s who don't take the time to dress sharp can easily find themselves dismissed from younger people's minds altogether. Once you've got gray (or no) hairs, wearing sloppy or battered clothing says "I'm done with life, you go on and don't pay any attention to me."

Cruel, but people are. So squash that train of thought before it gets started, and dress like someone who's active, confident, and important, whether you are or

not.

Tips for guys in their 60s or older on the wardrobe front:

- Embrace the traditional looks. Casual "Sunday" suits, tweeds, checked trousers -- you're old enough now that no one can question your right to wear 'em. Go nuts with the old-school stuff. Just keep it high-quality and well-fitted.
- Velvet jackets. Seriously. You can get away with them now.
- If you find yourself needing a cane, make it a nice one. Similarly, if you need orthopedic shoes, go for ones with nice leather uppers. Needing a little help getting around doesn't have to look clunky, medical, and impersonal.
- Be cautious "dressing down." You really, really want to avoid things like tracksuits (unless you're actually running) and old sweatshirts. They present an unfortunate stereotype that you want to avoid.

Keep it classy and dignified in your 60s. Your clothing should claim a respected status, not an easily-dismissed one.

## **The Limits of "Dressing Your Age"**

No written rule is going to apply universally to all men of a certain age.

Do older men, broadly speaking, look better in double-breasted navy suits with white pinstripes than men fresh out of college? Most people would say so. But there are going to be college-aged guys who can pull it off, and older men who frankly can't.

So don't let your age define your fashion. Just let it influence it, a bit, and maybe be leery of styles that have very specific, stereotypical age associations (like a college student's hoodie). You don't want to lock yourself in, no matter what your age.

## **CHAPTER 17: WORK VS. PLAY - WARDROBES ON AND OFF THE JOB**

There's a subtle distinction between "dressing sharp" for work and "dressing sharp" for the rest of your life.

The emphasis there is on "subtle." Most of a man's wardrobe can work equally well for professional and for personal settings. The distinction lies mainly in how they're worn.

### **The Work/Social Distinction - Does It Matter?**

You could argue that nice clothes are nice clothes, and that you should be able to wear the same ones on and off the clock.

And it turns out you can, if you want to! There are men who don't bother differentiating between their work clothes and their social clothes.

But small changes can help to send a useful signal. A man who looks good in his work clothes still looks like a man who just came from the office.

A man whose clothes clearly could not have been worn at the office, on the other hand, is making a deliberate statement: "I don't look this way by accident."

It tells people that you're not just someone who buys good clothes, you're also someone who thinks about how to wear them well. And that's a subtle distinction -- but a flattering one. Even people who don't think it through consciously are still more likely to identify you as a "sharp-dressed man" when there's no question of it being accidental.

It bears mentioning that you shouldn't even consider going the opposite route -- that is to say, buying fancy-looking evening clothes and then wearing them into work. That makes you look like you came straight from the Walk of Shame, and it does not say good things about your character.

### **How to Transition from Work Wear to Social Wear**

Switching from an on-the-job look to an off-the-job look is one of those "your mileage may vary" situations. The best way to do it depends on what you wear to your job.

But in general, the goal is to have at least one clothing element that is *not* work-appropriate, at least in the mind of the average viewer.

Here are some quick examples of transitions that can make a clear distinction:

- Men who wear ties to work can shed the tie, open the collar, and perhaps even undo the top button on the shirtfront. This is almost mandatory -- unless you're going somewhere very formal, no neckties after 5:00 PM or so.
- Men who don't wear ties can throw on a shirt or a jacket that's too brightly-colored or vividly-patterned for conventional offices.
- If there's no chance for a change (going straight from work to drinks at a bar, say), rolling up the shirtsleeves is always a good way to signify "off-duty."
- Upping the level of contrast in an outfit makes it less formal. That's why a lot of "social" shirts have multicolored stripes -- it lets one garment bring the formality level of the whole outfit down.
- Anything that's a little on the flamboyant side -- colored leather shoes, say, or brightly-colored pants -- is definitely off-duty wear, and works well in social settings.

Long story short: give it some pop. Put some flair in your outfit. Don't go so over the top you look like a clown, but don't be afraid to catch the eye a little. That's what makes it clear to everyone that you're not just some shmoe on his way home from the office.



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## Dressing Up at Night

All that works great if you want to dress down -- to relax, unwind, and let people know that you're taking it easy.

But what do you do when you need to go someplace dressy at night?

A couple easy strategies:

- Wear a jacket. A suit is fine; so are blazers and dressier sports jackets. Avoid anything too unstructured, and make sure the fit is reasonably close -- you want to look at ease, but not slumped.
- Skip the necktie. Unless you're going somewhere ties are required (such as some "white linen" restaurants), an open collar beneath a suit or jacket tells people that you're off-duty.
- Wear dark colors. This applies to suits, jackets, and trousers, but it can apply to the shirt as well. Deep, rich colors like burgundy and forest green give an air of richness but still couldn't be worn to work, making them ideal for evening social outfits.
- Play with contrasting formalities. If you need to look nice, but not stiff, pair something like a dressy blazer with dark, fitted jeans or a pair of Nantucket red pants. Or do the same thing with a nice pair of charcoal gray slacks and a casual, tweedy sports jacket on top. It's a way of effectively "dressing up dressing down."

A man can, of course, always avoid the issue by simply wearing a business-appropriate suit and tie to his nicer evening events. There's nothing *wrong* with that approach.

But it does tend to look a little stiff, and suggests that the wearer either isn't very imaginative or doesn't have much of a wardrobe at his disposal. Neither is an impression you necessarily want to send, which makes a clear day/night and work/play divide in your outfits worth building.

## **Section 4: Physical Properties of Clothing**



## CHAPTER 18: RAW MATERIALS - PROPERTIES AND PURPOSES

Textiles are an amazingly complex subject for study. People get graduate degrees in it.

An incredibly deep understanding of fabric isn't necessary to dress well. But some basic information about the raw materials that go into menswear can help you shop smarter and take better care of your clothes.

The following is a very *short* overview of the major types of materials commonly used in constructing garments for men: wool, cotton, linen, silk, and synthetic fibers.

### Wool

Sheep's wool is the base material for the vast majority of men's suits and the higher end of men's overcoats.

Finished bolts of cloth woven from wool can vary dramatically depending on the type of wool used, the method used for spinning the threads, the weave that joins the threads, and many other factors. *Wool is not a single, uniform clothing option.*

In general, however, all wool-based menswear shares a few desirable properties:

- **Drape** - Wool has a strong tendency to keep its shape. That makes it ideal for structured garments (like suits and jackets), and helps give it a smooth "drape" over a wearer's body.
- **Durability** - Wool cloth is densely packed with tiny fibers, and takes many years to break down or wear out. The biggest dangers to wool cloth are direct heat (which will shrivel and bunch the fibers) and insect damage. Water does not harm wool, but improper drying can shrink or distort its weave.
- **Luster** - Wool threads have a soft, textured surface that absorbs dye well. Colors tend to hold deep and fast in wool cloth, giving it a very rich appearance. Wool also contains its own natural oils, which help keep the surface supple and soft-looking.
- **Water Resistance** - The same natural oil, lanolin, helps wool cloth

repel water. A wool jacket isn't a rainproof shell, by any means, but it will keep the clothes under it dry for a surprisingly long time in light rains.

- **Warmth** - Without getting too technical here, wool threads contain more air pockets per square inch than those spun from other fabrics. That creates thousands of tiny, insulating chambers throughout the garment, resulting in a very heat-retaining piece of clothing. Simultaneously, it's more breathable, meaning you stay warmer and get less sweaty than you would in a garment of comparable weight made from another fiber

Because there are so many kinds of wool (including exotic options from animals other than sheep), and because it can be spun and woven in so many different ways, the material is also incredibly versatile. It can be used to make everything from coarse, hairy tweeds to ultrafine jackets with an almost silken handfeel.



With all that said, why isn't every garment made from wool? It comes with a few

disadvantages as well, which has led to at least some market for alternatives:

- **Cost** - Sheep are a lot less cost-efficient than fields of cotton, or machines cranking out synthetic fibers. The cost-per-ounce of wool fabric is much higher than other materials. And the finer the wool, the higher that cost gets, making it -- if not exactly a luxury fiber -- certainly one of the more expensive options out there for a man.
- **Care** - Wool is sturdy, but it needs to be washed and dried carefully. Wet wool loses much of its strength, and can be distorted or stretched if it isn't washed gently, while any intense heat will damage the fabric during drying. That makes most wool clothes hand-wash or dry-clean only. While those are fairly simple tasks, they're still more complicated than throwing cotton garments in a conventional washing machine.
- **Weight** - Most wools are heavy, warm, and bulky relative to other fabrics. There are very fine wools, and even very cool and breathable "tropical" wools, but these cost correspondingly more for their convenience.
- **Allergies** - Some sensitive skins react badly to the texture and the oils in wool. It's not a concern for most men, but a few unlucky souls will need lining or other garments between their skin and any wool clothing.

Wool, in a nutshell, is a fantastic outer layer. It works great for jackets, trousers, coats, and sweaters. It'll crop up in other applications from time to time as well -- knit ties, for example, are sometimes made of wool.

The maintenance can be a bit of extra hassle, compared to some of the no-thought options out there, but the luxurious feel and look of good wool makes it well worth the effort for your finest items. When you really want to impress, wool is your default.

## Cotton

As wool is the default for men's suits, so cotton is for men's shirts.

That's not without reason. Cotton is cheap, abundant, and easy to work with. It lacks the luxurious weight and drape of wool, but it comes with its own valued properties:

- **Ease of Care** - For many men, the biggest selling point is the no-thought laundry. Cotton cloth does not distort when soaked, and it takes a lot of heat to damage it (open flame will do the trick, or an iron left on, but you can crank a conventional drier up high without damaging most cotton clothes). That makes it a low-maintenance material for clothes that see a lot of regular wear.
- **Cost** - Quality can vary widely (more on that in a minute), but manufacturers can get cotton *very* cheap if they want to. Even the cheapest synthetics have a hard time undercutting the price of cotton, and most of the cheap synthetic options are less comfortable and sturdy. Cotton is still usually the most bang for your buck in terms of pure functionality.
- **Weight** - Cotton shirts are light. You can weave cotton threads thick, or even spin it into yarns for knit sweaters, but per square inch it's considerably lighter than wool. That makes it cool, comfortable, and portable.
- **Breathability** - Cotton is a porous fiber (at least when dry). It breathes, allowing sweat to evaporate off the skin and air to flow through the garment. Both are highly desirable properties in a garment that sits directly against the skin, and a big part of why cotton cloth remains the default shirting.

Cotton cloth tends to also be "trainable" -- you can press it into sharp creases and flat planes with very little effort. That comes with a downside, however, as your cotton shirts will just as happily "train" into any wrinkles or creases caused by storage.

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And, like every fiber, cotton has a few downsides that keep it from being the perfect choice in *every* situation:

- **Water Absorption** - Cotton fabric soaks up water and retains it. It lacks both the natural water resistance of wool and the "wicking" properties of some synthetic fibers. That means that when it gets wet, it stays wet -- and it gains weight and loses breathability in the process, removing two of its most attractive qualities. When you know you're going to be getting wet (or sweating heavily), cotton isn't the best choice.
- **Drape/Body** - Cotton cloth doesn't have the firm body of wool. Jackets and slacks made from cotton have a softer, more slumped look -- which isn't inherently *bad*, but which does need to be taken into account when you plan your looks. Similarly, cotton shirts usually need a good starching and ironing if you want them to look ultra-crisp.
- **Mildew Susceptibility** - Men in humid climates should beware of leaving cotton out wet. Mildew grows easily in the damp fibers, which will cause stains and smells, and can trigger allergies as well.

It's unlikely that anything will replace cotton as the default material for men's shirts and other simple garments in the near future. No matter what your style is like, you're going to be dealing with cotton to achieve it.

Learn to love it -- and to take care of it. Happily, conventional washing and drying will work for nearly any 100% cotton garment, which makes maintaining a large part of your wardrobe fairly easy.

## Linen

Every man owns clothing made from wool and cotton at some point in his life. They are fundamental defaults of the clothing industry.

Not so with linen. Some men go their whole lives without ever touching the stuff.

Linen is a plant fiber, like cotton, but the flax that it comes from is much more costly to grow and to turn into threads for weaving. In menswear, its primary use is for summer-weight clothing, particularly in Europe.

Almost any basic garment can be made from linen, including jackets, trousers, and shirts. Most of its unique properties, however, are double-edged, making it more of a niche material than cotton or wool:



- **Weight** - Linen is a very light, breezy fabric. It weighs considerably less than cotton, and is comparably breathable. That makes it an excellent choice for men in warm climates. However, it billows easily, and has no real drape to speak of, meaning that linen garments (unless starched) almost always have a soft, casual slump to them.
- **Low Memory** - Linen wrinkles easily, but the wrinkles tend to shake out and shift. It doesn't hold hard creases the way that a folded piece of wool cloth would. So long as the wearer doesn't mind a bit of a casually rumpled look, linen clothes can be packed down small, then shaken out and worn at once. However, making linen look crisp and wrinkle-free is challenging, and requires careful, low-heat ironing.
- **Light When Wet** - Unlike cotton, wet linen -- while it loses some breathability -- doesn't retain much water. It clings to the skin, but remains light, and it dries much faster than cotton. That makes it particularly valuable in humid, tropical climates with frequent, rapid shifts between rain and sun.

How much linen your wardrobe ends up containing will likely have a lot to do with climate. Men living in North America or northern Europe may have a jacket or a shirt or two as comfortable summer options, while men in climates closer to the equator may want a number of linen suits, trousers, jackets, and shirts.

There is a bit of a rule in fashion that men should only wear one linen item at a time (i.e., no linen jacket over a linen shirt), and it's not a bad starting guideline - but don't take it too seriously. So long as the items have distinct colors and textures, it's possible to mix linens without looking awkward.

## Silk

For all its recognition as a luxury fiber, silk is only of limited value in menswear.

Pure silk suits are essentially novelty items. It's more common as a lining material, and even then it tends to be more delicate and temperamental than simpler, more functional synthetics.

The most common (and practical) use for silk in menswear is as a light, breathable shirting fabric for tropical climates. It also sees use in traditional non-Western garb, where it can be wrapped and folded in multiple layers to create a sturdier outfit than a basic business suit.

## Artificial Fibers



There are enough different kinds of synthetic fibers that it's hard to lump them all into a single category.

Some are designed to be blended with natural fibers. Many suits, for example, including some quite expensive ones, will be 98% or 99% wool, rather than 100%, with the small non-wool percentage comprised synthetic strands that help give the wool fibers a strong "backbone" for added durability.

Others are used to create whole cloths, usually as a cost-saving measure. Polyester shirts are famously cheap -- and famously tacky, with shiny surfaces and an unpleasant, plastic-like feel against the skin.

Still more are used as liners, providing a sturdy shape for suit jackets and adding a mildew-resistant inner layer.

And modern athletic wear has seen the development of new fibers designed for flexibility, light weight, and ultra-fast water evaporation, not to mention breathable waterproofing for outerwear.

The takeaway there is that you shouldn't plan on owning a lot of clothes made from synthetic fibers -- but there's nothing wrong with owning a few if they serve a specific purpose. It's the cost-saving blends of cotton or wool with cheap synthetics like rayon and polyester that you want to avoid. Those do nothing but drag down the quality of your clothing, while adding little in the way of practical benefits.

## CHAPTER 19: FABRIC MEASUREMENTS AND WEIGHTS

In the last chapter, we talked about the fundamental properties of raw materials.

Cloth, however, is not just its raw material. Thread weight, weave, and even spinning techniques affect how a finished bolt of fabric looks and feels.

The textile industry is, unfortunately, not regulated with anything like consistency. The claims from some manufacturers will be much more reliable than the claims from others.

The listed numbers -- thread count, weight, and so forth -- should never be your sole deciding factor in a clothing purchase. There are just too many ways to game the system even without outright lying. But they can provide a helpful guideline, and it's worth understanding what claims are being made, even if they aren't 100% provable.

### Thread Count and Cotton Count

The most commonly advertised measurement standard for cotton goods is the "thread count," which measures the number of individual threads in one square inch of fabric.

In theory, this tells you how fine the threads are. The lighter and thinner the individual threads, the more of them there will be in a square inch, and thus the higher the thread count will be.

In reality, it's possible to make very thin threads out of fine, high-quality cotton - but it's also possible to make it out of cheap, flimsy cotton that will break down very quickly and feel scratchy against the skin. Additionally, some manufacturers will count every individual fiber twisted into each thread as a "thread" of its own, effectively tripling or quadrupling their listed thread count.

A more reliable standard, but one that isn't listed in most stores, is the "cotton count," which measures the number of hanks (lengths of spun thread) needed to weigh one pound. Finer threads are lighter, so the higher the cotton count, the softer and smoother the resulting cloth will be.

If you're investing in serious, upper-end menswear from a custom tailor, talk with him about the measurements used. Select a bolt of cloth with a cotton count that's at least in the 30s or 40s -- that's where the texture really starts to become

smooth and supple.

## Wool Yarn Count

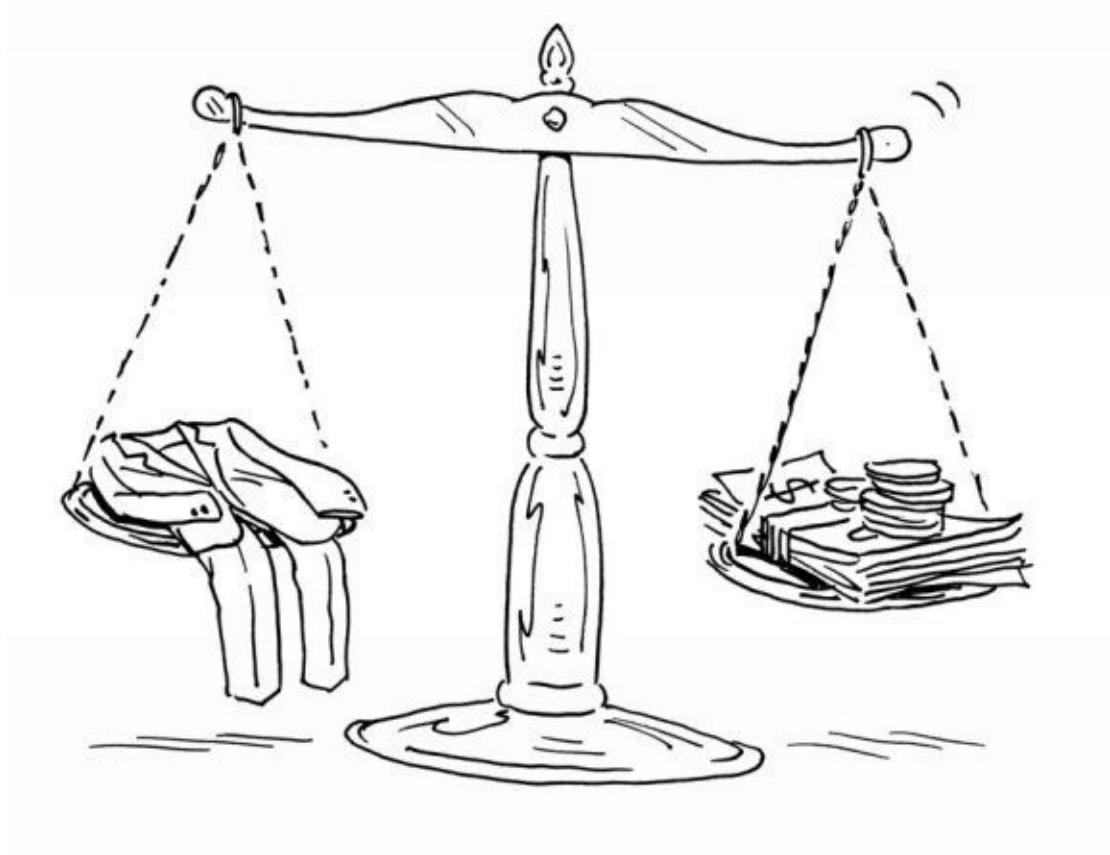
Like cotton, there are a couple of different measurements used to evaluate the fineness of wool cloths. The most common, however, is the yarn count, also called the worsted count or the S-count.

This is a slight inversion of the cotton count measurement. Instead of counting how many hanks of spun thread weigh one pound, it measures how many hanks can be spun from one pound of *raw wool*.

Different countries extend the scale to different scores, but most suit fabrics will fall between an 80 and a 200. The former would be a simple, sturdy worsted wool, while the latter would be a supple "ultrafine" with a light, almost liquid texture.

As with everything else, manufacturers get competitive about yarn count -- and sometimes play fast and loose with the standards as well.

Generally speaking, you want suits made from cloths measuring between 80 and 120-130 or so. Higher counts exist, but are much more likely to be exaggerated, and the few that do legitimately qualify are very delicate and high-maintenance. You want a suit that will hold up for a while, and the ultrafine threads simply aren't as sturdy.



## Fabric Weight

Bolts of cloth, regardless of material, are weighed by the square yard.

Since we're talking about a physical weight here, the sensation is about the same regardless of the raw material -- ten ounces of cotton denim isn't going to feel any heavier than ten ounces of linen (although the linen will likely be more breathable.)

- **Under 6 oz.** is a lightweight cloth. Thin shirts and some finer trousers fall into this range. It's hard to make cloth sturdy at this weight, so these tend to be less durable items.
- **6-10 oz.** is lightweight but sturdy, and a typical range for shirts and light trousers. Some "tropical" wools come in this range, as do many cotton and linen fabrics.
- **10-14 oz.** is a typical weight for both jackets and trousers. Most wool suits fall into this range. Denim and other sturdy cotton weaves also commonly fall into the 10-14 oz. range.

- **14 oz. and up** is the heavy end of fabric. Very few bolts of cloth weigh more than 20 oz. per square yard, apart from some tough canvases and other materials occasionally used for outerwear.

Note that weight is not really a measure of quality. A fabric can be light and cheap, or heavy and expensive. It tells you more about how heavy and warm the garment is going to feel than it does about the texture or the handfeel.

## Using Weights and Measurements

Most off-the-rack clothes do not have details like thread count or fabric weight printed on the tags.

That makes this information of limited use until you enter the world of custom-made clothing. Once you're there, however, most tailors price their wares based on the raw cloth, and should be able to discuss fabric measurements with you in detail.

A dedicated shopper can, by writing the manufacturing company (or in some cases visiting their website), get a sense for the fabrics used in off-the-rack clothing.

It's potentially worth your while if you're considering some items from the upper end stores, and want more detailed information. Cheaper brands and "big box" stores, however, are unlikely to stock anything with a high cotton count or a particularly fine yarn count, so save yourself the effort and just assume that you're getting basic, low-quality stuff there.

## CHAPTER 20: SPECIFIC CLOTHS AND WEAVES

Talking about fabrics is kind of fun.

The names are often old-fashioned and descriptive: houndstooth, birdseye; barleycorn.

Unfortunately, it's not always clear what those descriptive names *mean*. And the issue becomes even more complex when you talk about words that have changed in meaning over time or that have multiple meanings.

Some cloth names describe a single type of weave. Others refer to both a material and a weave. Still others refer to a visual pattern, which could be produced using a number of different weaves and techniques.

Here we list the most common types of cloth, first for suits (and by extension for jacket and trouser separates as well), then for shirts.

### Worsted Wool

The term "worsted" refers to a method of combing and spinning raw wool into thread. The fabrics made from those threads is also called "worsted wool," and can vary in texture considerably depending on how it is woven.

The majority of men's wool clothing uses worsted yarns, as opposed to the looser, airier woolen yarns.

If a garment is simply advertised as "worsted wool," with no other terminology (which is quite common, especially for suits), it generally means a bolt made from worsted threads in a smooth-surfaced, even-textured plain or twill weave.

### Wool Flannel

There are several different methods for producing the same basic effect, but wool cloth that has been given a soft, fuzzy surface is called "flannel."

The most common technique is to brush the fabric with a fine-toothed metal comb, pulling loose fine broken fibers that create the fuzzy "nap" of the flannel's surface.

Both worsted and woolen flannels exist. The latter tends to be lighter, fluffier, and less stout than the former. Neither should be confused with cotton flannel

(more traditionally called flannelette), a similar cloth made from cotton and typically used in men's work shirts rather than suits and trousers.

## **Tweed Wool**

Tweed is a coarse fabric woven from unfinished woolen yarns. The resulting surface is much "hairier" than worsted or flannel cloth.

Most tweeds are earth tone, often in several mottled colors made from twisting together yarns dyed with different natural vegetable and lichen pigments.

Certain Irish and Scottish cultures have their own trademarked varieties of tweed, including Donegal and Harris Tweed. Tweed clothing tends to be stout, rugged, and water-resistant, with little or no treatment that would remove the natural lanolin oil from the sheep's wool.

## **Tropical Wool**

Very tightly-coiled worsted yarns, often made from the hair of angora goats rather than sheep, are used to make wool cloths that are significantly lighter than traditional suiting fabrics.

These "tropical" wools are used for suits, jackets, and trousers -- pretty much any wool clothing you can imagine, since men in hot, humid climates need them too, and this offers them the most comfortable option.

## **Twill**

A broad family of weaves, twill cloths are characterized by visible diagonal "ribbing" on one or both sides of the cloth. The weave is used for both wool and cotton fabrics -- blue jeans are one of the most recognizable examples, and most khakis and other cotton slacks also use twill weaves.

## **Herringbone**

A modification of the twill weave gives fabrics a repeating, up-and-down pattern of V-shaped chevrons laid out in vertical columns.

When the threads are all the same color, the pattern is noticeable only up close, adding a subtle texture to the cloth. If there is a slight difference in color, the pattern is much more visible, making it both bolder and more casual.

Herringbone is used in shirts, jackets, trousers, and suits alike.

## Pick-and-Pick/Sharkskin

A twill weave of worsted yarns, one light and one dark, is traditionally called pick-and-pick. In the United States, the term "sharkskin" is sometimes applied to the cloth, especially when very fine yarns are woven very tightly to create a slick, almost shimmering effect.

Pick-and-pick has long been a business wear staple. It is almost always used for suits, rather than unmatched jackets or trousers.

## Houndstooth

The unevenly-shaped checks of the houndstooth weave are so unique and recognizable that some designers have used the pattern as a print on plain-woven cloth.

In its original form, however, the jagged check pattern is made with a weave of two dark and two light colors, traditionally dark and light gray or black and white. Both woolen and worsted yarns are commonly used, and the finished cloth is used to make suits, jackets, trousers, and overcoats.

## Birdseye

A regular pattern of small, round dots makes the birdseye weave a popular choice for less formal business suits. The weave requires four threads, two light and two dark, with the light threads making the round dots.

Birdseye is most commonly seen in worsted wool suits and jackets.

## Nailshead

While it is often lumped into the same description as birdseye, nailshead is a different weave. It looks similar to birdseye, with smaller and less regularly-shaped dots. Like birdseye, it is most commonly used for worsted suits and jackets.

## Barleycorn

A variation on the twill weave creates the "barleycorn" effect: a repeated pattern of small, three-lobed clusters contrasting with the background color.

Barleycorn is a traditional choice for sports jackets, including those made from luxury wools like merino and cashmere. It can also be used to make suits, but the effect is so casual barleycorn suits work better as social rather than business



attire.

## **Gabardine**

Typically made from worsted wool (although cotton and blended versions exist), gabardine is a tight weave with more warp yarns than weft. It forms a very tough surface, and was originally made with waxed or otherwise waterproofed yarns to create a breathable alternative to rubber raincoats.

In modern fashion, gabardine is used to make casual jackets and overcoats, especially the short—waisted "weekender" jackets popular in the 1950s (and on again, off again, ever since).

## **Faille**

One of the only satin weaves used in menswear, faille has a plain matte outer surface and a slick, shiny inner face. Because the inner surface is so smooth, it can be worn comfortably against bare skin without a lining. It is a popular suiting material in the Middle East, where the same fabric is also used for many non-Western garments.

## **Sunshot**

This unusual weave creates alternating columns of short, diagonal lines, with the diagonals of one set steeper than the diagonals of the other.

The effect is a subtle, shimmering surface. Brown, yellow, and orange are the most commonly used yarn colors, giving the cloth a somewhat flame-like appearance from which it takes its poetic name.

Sunshot garments are not common. When they appear, it is usually as a sports jacket or a pair of unmatched trousers.

## **Bedford Cord**

A special weave -- called the Bedford weave -- using worsted yarn produces a tight, tough fabric with a faintly gridded texture.

Most commonly associated with horseback riding clothes, Bedford cord is occasionally used to make sports jackets, odd trousers, and overcoats. It is a traditional fabric for the British gentry and nobility in their leisure wear.

## **Seersucker**

Bridging the gap between suit fabrics and shirt fabrics we have seersucker: a dimpled, lightweight cotton weave used for both.

Seersucker is light, breezy, and casual. It is woven using a special kind of loom, which creates a fabric that bunches tighter in some places than in others. The surface of seersucker cloth is covered in bumpy waves.

Seersucker suits are a summer tradition, especially in the American South, where they are still accepted as both work and social wear. Seersucker pants and shirts are common casual summertime options all over the world.

## Oxford

One of the most common types of shirting, oxford is made of bundles of thread crossing at right angles (called a "basketweave"). It is simple, sturdy, and slightly bumpy due to the bundles of threads.

Shirt makers will sometimes specify "pinpoint Oxford" to denote the use of particularly fine threads, while "royal Oxford" is finer still. Since the standards are neither specific nor monitored, those descriptions should be taken with a grain of salt, but ideally a royal oxford shirt will feel completely smooth, while a pinpoint shirt will be smooth but still retain the faint bumpiness of regular oxford cloth.

## Poplin

The plain weave used to create poplin is one of the simplest out there. Traditionally, poplin shirts used threads of two different materials to create a slightly dimpled, irregular texture.

These days, most poplin shirts are 100% cotton. Some use threads of different thickness to retain the dimpled texture, while others are smooth-surfaced. The latter is more common in dress shirts, while the former is sometimes used in polo and tennis shirts.

## Broadcloth

Broadcloth is a very tight weave with a smooth, almost shiny surface.

"End on end" broadcloth uses two different colors of thread, typically white and a dyed color. Because the weave is so tight, the colors blend, creating what appears to be a single solid color with a faint shimmer to it. This is one of the more expensive shirt cloths.

## Gauze

The loose plain weave that gave medical gauze its name can also be used to make shirts. It is particularly common in safari shirts and button-fronted silk shirts designed for tropical climates.

## Madras

Most famous in its dyed plaid version, madras is a unique fabric woven by hand, often on makeshift "looms" stretched between two trees or poles. Like gauze, it is a wide, loose weave with visible gaps in the structure.

"Patchwork madras" refers to bolts made by stitching together many smaller swatches of madras cloth end-to-end. Since the hand-weaving method can only produce short lengths, this is often necessary for the construction of large clothing items.

## Piqué

Piqué is a knitted cloth, rather than a woven one. It is commonly used in polo shirts, and is also used for the stiff front bib of formal shirts.

## Jersey Knit/Jersey Stitch

Most men aren't familiar with the name, but the jersey knit gives us the basic knit cotton cloth used for T-shirts, underwear, and dozens of other lightweight cotton garments. It is smooth, soft, and quite stretchy.

All the weaves and knits listed above are only the most common in menswear -- there are hundreds more beyond these, all with specific names, histories, and purposes.

What does a man actually need to know? The two dozen or so listed here are a good starting place, particularly the first handful of suit and shirting options.

If you can tell a worsted wool from a twill, recognize the soft nap of flannel, and differentiate between knit cotton and woven cotton, take heart -- you're already ahead of most men.

## CHAPTER 21: UNDERSTANDING COLOR

Colors, complexions, matching -- how does it all work?

It's easy to get overwhelmed by the theories of color, if you look at it in strict, scientific terms. Happily, you can dress well with just an understanding of the basics: your complexion, a few color-matching strategies, and a well-balanced wardrobe.

It may seem trivial, but don't underestimate the importance of color choice. Most viewers won't consciously recognize a bad pairing as "clashing" (unless it's truly egregious), but their brains will still be subtly off-put by the bad visual signals.

An ounce of prevention being worth a pound of cure, it's worth your while to build a wardrobe that color-balances naturally. You'll save yourself worry (and potential embarrassment) in the long run.

### Understanding Complexions and Contrast

The most important color-related issue for a man to understand doesn't actually have anything to do with specific colors.

Rather, the key concern is the level of *contrast* between colors in his complexion.

As a general rule of thumb, a man's outfit should ideally have about the same amount of inherent contrast as his complexion.

That means that if you've got a very muted, low-contrast complexion, you don't want very vivid, stark contrasts between bright and dark colors all through your outfit. If, on the other hand, you have a substantial amount of contrast in your complexion, you don't want a subdued, monochrome outfit.

Here's what "contrast" looks like, in terms of men's complexions:

- **High-contrast men** have significant differences between the colors of their hair, skin, and eyes. A light-skinned man with black or dark brown hair is high contrast; so is a dark-skinned man whose hair has gone gray or white with age. Eyes can contribute here too -- a ruddy-skinned redhead with brown eyes has less natural contrast than one with bright blue eyes.

- **Low-contrast men** have similar colors throughout their complexion. Dark-skinned men with black hair and brown eyes are low contrast. So are light-skinned men with pale blonde hair and light blue or green eyes.
- **Medium-contrast men** fall between the two: they have some variation, but the divisions aren't stark. Many lighter-skinned black men are medium-contrast, as are men with tanned skin and dark hair whose eyes are relatively light-colored.

While matching contrast levels isn't a hard and fast rule, it is a good guideline. Lower-contrast men make strong, bold contrasts look more vivid, which can become overwhelming, while high-contrast men tend to seem a little washed-out in muted color schemes.

Men looking to add contrast to their outfits should be thinking in terms of clear, sharp dividing lines between very dissimilar colors: white against black, blue against yellow, and so on. To reduce color, men should lay similar colors side by side instead: blues next to purples and greens, reds next to oranges and yellows, and so on.

## Matching Schemes - The Color Wheel

Figuring out your general level of contrast is a lot easier when you know which colors "go together" and which colors "clash."

A lot of the language people use to talk about colors is subjective. Some of it is downright misleading -- for example, a lot of people will talk about clothes as "matching," as in "does this shirt match this jacket," when what they're actually talking about is a good color relationship.

The color wheel -- a circular diagram of the visible color spectrum -- is a handy cheat-sheet for wardrobe planning here.

You don't need to understand the scientific theories of how light strikes our eyes and sends signals through our optic nerves to see how the colors relate to one another on the diagram. A glance shows you how any one color relates to all the others, and with that information you can plan a coherent color scheme:

- **Complementary color schemes** are a visually-appealing, high-contrast strategy. Colors that are directly opposite one another on the color wheel, called "complementary colors," relate in a way that seems natural and harmonious to our eyes. However, they also

register as very distinct and separate colors, making them a better option for high-contrast men than low-contrast.

- **Analogous color schemes** take the opposite approach, using two or three colors that are directly adjacent to one another on the color wheel. This provides variety, but little contrast, creating a flattering color scheme for low-contrast men.
- **Triad color schemes** use three colors evenly spaced from one another on the color wheel (purple/green/orange), for example. They work well for men who want variety, but still want to keep their colors balanced. It's a good approach for men of any complexion when they want a bright, vibrant outfit that doesn't clash.

There are more complicated varieties you can get into (split-complementary schemes, for example, where one color is paired with the two colors directly *adjacent* to its complement), but those three -- complementary, analogous, and triad -- all represent effective, balanced approaches that make good use of color wheel relationships.

Should you feel bound to the color wheel? No. Not entirely, at any rate.

It is a good way of testing how "natural" a color scheme is. Our eyes and brains like things that balance nicely along the visible color spectrum.

But the color wheel also only works in "pure" colors, at their brightest and most unadulterated. It doesn't take into account hues and shades (created by adding white and black, respectively, to lighten or darken a color), and it doesn't represent earth tones (made by a mix of colors) or the black-to-white grayscale at all.

That makes it a good guideline when you're working with bright colors -- but not the sum total of color for men.

## A Color-Balanced Wardrobe

At the end of the day, matching is going to be easiest when you have clothes that work well together.

This goes back to the core idea of an interchangeable wardrobe (see Chapter 5 for more detail on that subject). Ideally, you want to be able to "match" most of your clothes with most of your other clothes.

That means having a wardrobe that's long on versatile, flexible pieces, with a

few more unique and colorful items for spice. Here's a rough breakdown of the colors found in menswear, in order from the most-useful to the least-useful:

### *White*

This is the default "blank slate" color -- plain, neutral, and above reproach. A white dress shirt is pretty much always acceptable, from the most casual settings on up to anything short of formal attire. (Even then the shirts are white -- just a little more specific in construction).

White works best as part of an outfit's "background" rather than the dominant color. Shirts will always work; jackets and trousers are more iffy. Save them for fancy events like weddings, or pair them with some colored shirts and accents to relax them a bit.

Emotionally, white is associated with purity and health.

### *Gray*

Like black and white, gray is color-neutral. It's less stark than those options, however, which makes it a prime choice for a good deal of menswear, especially business attire: suits, trousers, and jackets all do well in any shade of gray, with the darker shades more formal than the lighter.

Gray shirts are less common, but can be a good neutral base when white would be too stark or formal.

Typical emotional associations for gray are strength, authority, and dignity, as well as age and maturity.

### *Navy Blue*

This is your most colorful option for business suits, as well as for the more conservative end of blazers and jackets. It's the only accepted alternative to charcoal gray and plain black for strict business wear.

Blue is a youthful color, making navy a good color for older men who want to add a hint of vibrancy without seeming frivolous. It goes naturally with yellow (they're complementary colors -- remember the color wheel?), making navy blazers and khakis an enduringly popular combination.

Deep blue has emotional associations with stability, responsibility, and conservatism.

### *Black*



For all its formal associations, black isn't actually as common in menswear as the colors we've listed above.

Its main role is as an accent color to other dark clothing: black shoes, belts, watches, and sometimes ties go well with gray and navy suits, jackets, and slacks.

Black suits do exist, but they're excessively somber for many occasions, and less flattering to most men's complexions than charcoal or navy. Broadly speaking, it works better as an accent color than a core color.

Emotionally, black is associated with formality, solemnity, sadness, and mystery. The latter also sometimes makes it a "sexy" color -- black jeans and black jackets have bad boy appeal.

### **Blue (Non-Navy)**

The above colors represent the most business-formal end of menswear: black, charcoal gray, and navy for suits, and white for shirts.

Now we start moving into brighter, livelier colors, of which blue has the largest role in menswear.

Through various accidents of history (primarily the specific costs of dyes and soaps at the start of the Industrial Revolution), blue became the default color for many working men's cotton shirts. We get the phrase "blue collar" from the days of detachable shirt collars, when working-class families dyed the white collars blue to keep them from showing wear and tear as quickly.

Light blue shirts, as well as white shirts with various blue patterns on them, make up the majority of non-white dress shirts. Blue oxford is the iconic material here.

There are also blue jeans, in shades ranging from light powder blue to deep indigo, and many different shades of blue used in necktie patterns.

If you really don't *like* blue, it's possible to avoid it. But for most men, it'll be the dominant color in the day-to-day wardrobe, so plan to own lots of things that go well with it.

A few emotional associations with bright shades of blue: youth, hard work, middle class values.

### **Brown**

On the subject of things that go well with blue: brown items do it very well.

Brown enters men's wardrobes both as an accent color (brown leather shoes, belts, watch bands, etc.) and as a core color (brown slacks, sports jackets, and occasionally suits).

Because brown is a blend of visible colors, rather than a color on the color wheel, it tends to not clash with anything. It can look awkward with black, but -- depending on the brightness -- brown is usually a safe, neutral pairing for any color.

Various lighter browns and earth tones make up the bulk of tweed jackets and suits, as well as most of the non-dark dress slacks. Even khakis generally read as a light brown, verging into yellow depending on the shade.

It's a practical functional color, and it deserves a lot of room in your wardrobe. Most people associate brown with trustworthiness (it's been a favorite color of salesmen for generations), common sense, and comfort.

## *Yellow*

Once you take into account the full range of golds, light yellows, yellowish tans/khakis, and yellow-greens, yellow has a surprisingly large spot in the wardrobe.

It's a common choice for both patterned and solid shirts, a staple of neckties, and -- in its most subdued forms -- a natural color for slacks, especially those paired with blue blazers.

For most men, this will be the best-represented of the bright colors. That doesn't mean it'll dominate the wardrobe, but it should be in there, and the more blue you have the more yellow will come in handy for creating complementary color schemes.

Emotionally, yellow represents energy, optimism, and extroversion. The brighter the hue, the stronger the emotional association.

## *Green*

At this point we're well into accent colors that have only a small role in the wardrobe. Green, and all the following colors, will have as large a part in your wardrobe as you want: most men will have a favorite accent color or two (hopefully ones that go well with their complexions), and very little of the others.

Green blazers are not unheard of, especially in East Coast prep circles. Other than that, greens mostly appear in patterns on shirts, or as an olive drab in casual and business-casual wear. Green overcoats are not uncommon, and bright green pants (usually denim or corduroy) are available for the fashion forward.

The color is most commonly associated with health, vigor, and nature.

### *Purple*

Like green, purple can occasionally crop up as a rich jacket or suit color, but it mostly appears as part of a pattern.

Lavender striping is sometimes used in place of traditional white pinstriping, and the color is popular for dress shirts and neckties as well. It's seen as a "safe" way for men to work some color into their business wardrobes.

Associations for purple are exoticism and royalty -- a holdover from times when purple dyes were extremely expensive to make.

### *Red*

There are really only two main uses for red in a men's wardrobe: as a "power" color, generally used for neckties and pocket squares, and in light shades of pink or deep oxblood hues for shirts (solid and patterned against a white background).

Some men may also end up with red-tone leathers. Traditional cordovan, still used for casual dress shoes, has a bloody red tint, and has spawned imitators as well.

Red is associated with power, sex, and flamboyance -- all of which are "a little goes a long way" sorts of associations.

### *Orange*

Neckties, pocket squares, contrast stitching on dark-colored jeans, and not much else -- that's the lot of orange in the man's wardrobe.

It can work as a shirt color, especially for dark-skinned men, but orange is mostly just too bright to serve a role beyond small accents. The only place you'll see orange suits or jackets is at proms and at universities with orange in their school colors.

If orange has an emotional association, it's with wacky, over-the-top fun and extroversion. Use it sparingly.

## CHAPTER 22: UNDERSTANDING PATTERN

Big blocks of solid color aren't necessarily the most flattering look out there.

Some guys can pull it off (especially high-contrast men -- see the previous chapter for more discussion about contrast), but most of us look better with varied lines and shapes in there to break up the colors.

Patterns are not as challenging as they might seem to fashion novices. You can mix and match them pretty freely, following one basic rule:

**Never put two different patterns *of the same scale* directly adjacent to one another.**

That means if you're wearing a jacket with thin, wide-spaced pinstripes, don't wear a shirt with broad, thin-lined checks underneath. The patterns are different, but there isn't enough difference between their physical scales.

The same pinstriped jacket would work just fine with a small-scale microcheck shirt, or even with thick vertical stripes. It's about varying the scale up more than it is the specific patterns.

Most available patterns break down into stripes (lines going a single way), checks (lines intersecting at right angles), and figures (repeating arrangements of a small design or shape). Those three basic approaches lend themselves to a startling array of options; here we list the most common in menswear, along with their dimensions.

### Pin Stripe

The most restrained pattern a man can get short of a solid color, pinstripes are often seen on business suits, jackets, and trousers. White stripes against a dark background is the most traditional approach.

One of the defining features of a pinstripe pattern is that the stripes are spaced substantially further apart than their own width. That leaves a lot of "empty" space in the base color of the fabric, relative to larger, busier patterns.

**Dimensions:** Stripes of less than 1/16", separated by gaps of at least 1/4".

### Chalk Stripe/Pencil Stripe

Wider than pinstripes, chalk stripes are still designed so that the stripe is narrower than the gaps between stripes. This is another popular suit and jacket pattern, slightly less formal than pinstripes, but it is also used (usually in brighter colors) for casual dress shirts.

The term "pencil stripe" is sometimes used to describe the same basic pattern. The two are functionally interchangeable; the only major difference is that people are more likely to call a light-colored stripe on a dark background a "chalk stripe" (due to its similarity to lines on a chalkboard), while brighter colors and lighter backgrounds are usually called "pencil stripes."

**Dimensions:** Stripes typically run between 1/16" and 1/8" in width, separated by spaces of at least 1/4".

## Candy Stripe

A symmetrical pattern made of two alternating colors, each one in stripes of the same width. This is very widely used in shirts, and occasionally in casual suits and jackets (especially seersucker).

Most candystripe patterns use a single color, alternated with white stripes. Blue and oxblood red are the most common for dress shirts, but any color will work. The white stripes make the other color read from a distance as slightly lighter than it actually is.

**Dimensions:** Each stripe is about 1/8" - 1/4" wide.

## Bengal Stripe

A wider version of the candystripe, Bengal stripes are bolder and less common. The name always implies a colored stripe alternating with a white one. Dark blues and purples are the most traditional color choices.

Like candy striping, Bengal stripes are typically seen on dress shirts, but they are also sometimes used to make casual jackets, trousers, and even suits. It is most common in South Asia, where the pattern is used in non-Western clothing styles as well.

**Dimensions:** Each stripe is about 1/4" - 3/4" wide.

## Awning Stripe

The widest type of alternating, same-size striping, awning stripes are mostly only seen in novelty clothing. Carnival barkers sometimes wear awning stripe

jackets in red and white, and they tend to show up on the sidelines of college football games as well, in the local team's colors.

You can get away with awning stripes if you have a big personality, a big body, or both. It's also a viable pattern for casual and pajama pants, especially the drawstring variety. Otherwise, leave it to the carnies -- and to actual awnings, from which the pattern takes its name.

**Dimensions:** Very broad stripes -- at least 3/4" wide, and often 2" - 3" wide.

## Rail Stripe

A repeating pattern of two narrow stripes separated by a small gap, with a wider gap in between each set of stripes, is called "rail striping" (for obvious reasons).

Occasionally, a rail stripe will add a third, dashed line down the middle. In most cases the stripes are all one color, against a solid background of another color. The pattern is used for both suits and shirts. It is less common on unmatched jackets or trousers.

**Dimensions:** Variable, but the stripes are usually quite thin (1/4" or less), spaced about a half-inch apart with a gap of an inch or more between each set of stripes.

## Variegated Striping

Multiple vertical stripes of varying widths and color, whether against a background color or dominating the whole garment, are referred to as "variegated stripes." The effect is bold and often a little overwhelming, making it largely a pattern for casual shirts and very fashion-forward trousers.

**Dimensions:** Variable, but each individual stripe is usually no more than 1/2" wide or so.

## Herringbone

A textured weave rather than a dyed pattern: vertical columns of small, repeating V-shapes. If the warp and the weft threads are different colors, the pattern becomes more pronounced.

Herringbone is a popular choice for suits, jackets, trousers, and shirts alike. It is often used to add a little more visual interest to a solid-colored item.

**Dimensions:** Columns are usually between 1/4" and 1/2" wide. The thickness of the "V" shape is determined by the threads or yarns used in the weave.

## Houndstooth

A "broken check" grid of jagged repeating shapes, usually rendered in black and white or dark gray and light gray. Like herringbone, houndstooth is created by a specific weave, in this case one that uses two threads of each color.

**Dimensions:** Varies based on the threads used. A typical houndstooth pattern has checks about 1/4" square. If the pattern is printed rather than woven, it can be blown up or shrunk down to any scale, including very exaggerated ones.

## Plaid/Tartan

A style of check created by crossing bands of two or more colors, typically using more than one size of band. A specific weave creates alternating diagonal slashes wherever the colored bands intersect.

In most of the world, these patterns are called "tartan." In the United States and Canada they are more commonly called "plaid," after a specific Scottish garment traditionally woven in tartan.

**Dimensions:** Vary widely. Most tartans have at least one broad band of color (at least 1/2" wide) and one narrow (less than 1/4") wide.

## Glen Check/Prince of Wales

A specific type of tartan that has seen enough use in menswear to warrant its own category, a "Glen check" pattern uses different numbers and sizes of bands for its vertical and horizontal elements. That makes the resulting pattern irregular, with larger and smaller rectangles formed by the intersecting bands.

There is no specific color formula for Glen check, but the most common styles use predominantly muted colors like grays and dark blues, sometimes with a single thin line of a bright color in the vertical and horizontal patterns to create a grid that "pops" out from the rest of the weave.

**Dimensions:** No fixed dimensions, but most Glen checks work on a fairly small scale relative to other tartans. The bands are usually not more than 1/2" wide.

## Gingham

Another tartan variant, gingham is specifically a two-tone plaid with identical horizontal and vertical arrangements. It produces a more regular grid than plaids where the vertical and horizontal layouts are different.

Frequently, all the bands are the same size, making gingham a regular grid pattern of squares in three colors: each base color, plus the diagonal blending of the two. White paired with one other color is the most common color scheme for gingham.

Gingham usually shows up on casual work shirts, but it can also be used for pocket squares and neckties, and very large-scale gingham is sometimes used to make casual sports jackets.

**Dimensions:** Varies. Anywhere from 1/4" to 3/4" is a typical width for each band of color on a gingham shirt, but it can go smaller or wider. Gingham sports jackets usually enlarge the pattern significantly, with each band of color at least an inch wide, and sometimes more.

## Windowpane

A broad check, windowpane basically takes a pinstripe or a chalk stripe and lays the same pattern down horizontally as well as vertically to create a grid.

It is distinguished by having gaps substantially larger than the lines of the grid. Windowpane is most commonly seen on sports jackets, and on some dress shirts; in both cases it is a fairly casual pattern.

**Dimensions:** Gridlines of 1/4" or less. Spacing can vary, but is generally quite wide -- at least 1" between lines, and sometimes as much as 2" or 3".

## Graph Check

Essentially windowpane with smaller gaps, "graph check" is a broad definition applied to any medium-scale grid of single, solid lines. It is usually used for dress shirts, with a light color against a white background the most common variant.

**Dimensions:** The thickness of the lines can vary, but they are usually 1/8" thick or narrower. The empty squares of the grid are usually thicker, with at least 1/4" between lines.

## Microcheck

There's no formal standard for when a graph check has become a "microcheck" shirt, but as a general rule of thumb the term is usually used for checked shirts where the pattern is fine enough to read as solid from a distance.

That means that the empty spaces between gridlines usually aren't much bigger



than the gridlines themselves, allowing the two colors to blend at a distance. As with graph check, a white background with colored gridlines is the most common combination. This is almost exclusively a shirt pattern, though it occasionally crops up on neckties or pocket squares as well.

**Dimensions:** Very fine lines, usually 1/16" or less. Spaces between lines are usually 1/8" or less. The gaps are still wider than the lines, but not dramatically.

## Tattersall

Grid patterns like windowpane and microcheck are usually made with a single line color against a blank (usually white) background color.

Tattersall uses two or more colors for its gridlines, alternating the colors both horizontally and vertically. In some cases the lines of one color will be thicker than the other, or one color's lines will be dashed rather than solid.

This is a common dress shirt pattern, and occasionally gets used for pocket squares as well.

**Dimensions:** The size of the grid can vary, but the lines are usually fairly close-spaced, with no more than a 1/2" gap between them. The lines themselves are usually quite thin -- 1/8" or narrower.

## Birdseye

One of the more common woven figure patterns: a series of small, regular dots against a plain background. Lighter dots against a dark background are the most common approach, but birdseye can come in any combination of colors.

A popular pattern for casual suits and jackets, this is a good alternative for men who don't want a solid color but prefer to avoid vertical stripes. At a distance, it reads like a solid or slightly mottled color, rather than a distinct pattern.

**Dimensions:** The dots are generally between 1/16" and 1/8" across. The gaps between them are generally about the same size, or just a touch wider.

## Nailshead

Similar to birdseye, nailhead or nailshead fabric is another woven pattern with slightly smaller and less regular dots. The dots are made by a thread emerging from the weave and then dipping back under it, creating a faintly dimpled texture.

Like birdseye, nailshead can look solid from a distance. It is similarly used to create casual suits and sports jackets.

**Dimensions:** The dots in nailshead are only the width of one or two individual yarns -- usually less than 1/16" across. They tend to be slightly longer than they are wide, rather than perfectly circular.

## Barleycorn

Yet another woven figure pattern, barleycorn is a repeating series of tri-lobed clusters against a solid background. Like birdseye and nailshead, the pattern is created by yarns of one color emerging from a weave of a different color.

Because the figures are more complex, barleycorn is a bolder and more casual pattern than birdseye or nailshead. It is used almost exclusively for sports jacket, particularly tweed jackets.

**Dimensions:** The full, tri-lobed shape is generally between 1/8" - 1/4" square. The pattern has no relation to the archaic British unit of measurement called a "barleycorn," which is a linear measurement about 1/3" long.

## Paisley

A broad family of repeated patterns against solid backgrounds, paisley always includes a characteristic teardrop shape with a curled end. Depending on the culture of origin (and who you ask), the shape is often said to represent a mango seed, a palm spray, or a cypress tree. It goes by many different names in the Middle East and South Asia.

In Western menswear, paisley is predominantly used for neckties and bandannas. Because of the latter association, it is *not* commonly used for pocket squares -- it's not unheard of, but most men don't want to give the impression that they're using their sweat-rag as a pocket square.

Paisley is an effective way to incorporate a pattern that isn't strictly gridded or linear into your outfit. That works best as a small accent like a necktie, however -- paisley shirts can be quite overwhelming, and have strong associations with hippie culture as well.

**Dimensions:** Varies widely, but the paisley graphics tend to be fairly wide-spaced, leaving a decent amount of plain background color visible.

## Polka Dot

A very casual pattern of large, solid circles against a contrasting background. The dots are usually arranged in a regular grid, with all dots the same size.

We think of polka dots as being almost a novelty pattern, but in restrained colors they can look downright dignified on small items like neckties and pocket squares. Use the pattern sparingly, but don't discount it entirely.

**Dimensions:** No standard width or spacing here. Smaller dots with wider spacing look dressier; bigger dots or a more crowded layout look less refined.

## **Section 5: Menswear, Piece by Piece**

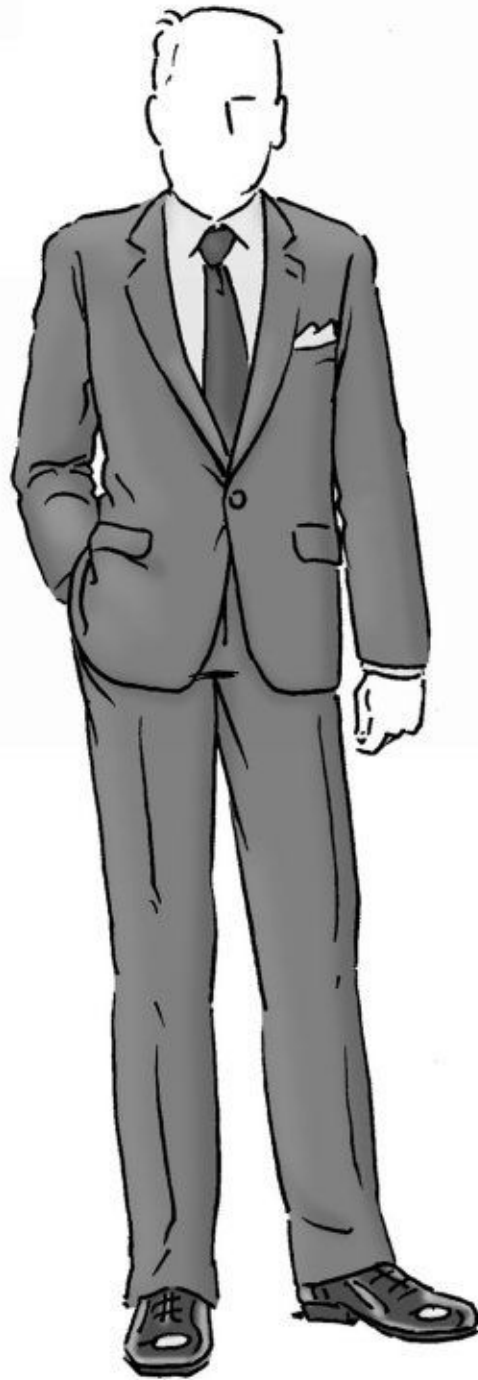
## CHAPTER 23: MEN'S SUITS

In previous chapters we've talked about broad concepts that apply to many different kinds of menswear: color, pattern, interchangeability, and so forth.

Now it's time to get down into the nitty-gritty.

What makes a suit a suit? And why is it the enduring icon of a well-dressed man?

Here's where you find out.



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## The Modern Suit

As far as fashions go, what we think of as a conventional, contemporary men's suit in the early 21st century is an impressively enduring style.

The basics started to evolve around the end of the 19th century, and the style as a whole hasn't changed much in its core principles since the 1920s and 1930s.

Variations have come in and out of style, of course, and there will always be new and aggressive re-interpretations, but the men's suit has followed a familiar pattern for the better part of a century now:

- a matched trouser/jacket pairing cut from the same cloth
- a V-shaped front opening
- a turned-down collar
- folded lapels stitched to the collar
- a working, buttoning front (no zippers or pullover-style tops)
- anywhere from zero to two vents (vertical slits running up from the bottom hem in the back)

That basic formula has had an impressively long run, and it shows no sign of being replaced any time soon.

What *does* change -- to some degree -- are the details of the cut and style, and that's where a man has an opportunity to express his individuality if he wants to. Suits can also be fitted in different ways, some of them more flattering than others, and it pays to know what you should ask of your tailor.

## A Suit's Fit

More important than any other style consideration, you want a suit to sit as flatteringly as possible on your body.

Described below is the "perfect" suit fit. This is an ideal that's tough to reach without custom-tailoring, but you can get surprisingly close with careful shopping and some inexpensive adjustments to an off-the-rack suit. The key is to buy a suit that already comes as close as possible to the following fits:

- ***The collar*** should touch your shirt collar all the way around your neck. There should be no gap between the two. If the jacket collar stands off from the shirt collar, the neck opening is too large.

# JACKET COLLAR

Perfect Fit



Standing away



Bunching in back



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- ***The shoulders*** of a suit jacket are very difficult to adjust. Never buy a suit whose jacket sits badly on your shoulders! The seam where the shoulder meets the sleeve should sit at the very end of your shoulder - not partway down the bicep, and not partway toward the neck.



# THE SHOULDER

Just Right



Too Small



Too Big



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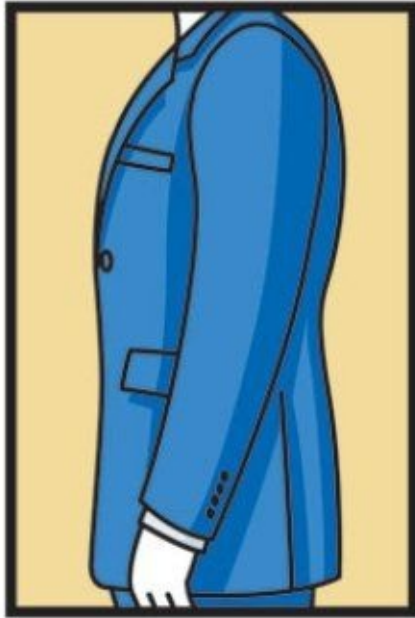
- **The armscye** -- the hole where the sleeves meet the torso -- is more important than most men give it credit for. If it's too tight, the seam will dig up into the armpit. If it's too loose, the armpits will sag, pulling the side of the suit out from the body. Like the shoulders, this is a tough one to adjust, so save yourself trouble and never buy a jacket that isn't a close (but not overtight) fit at the armscye.
- **The arm pitch** is the angle of the sleeve where it joins the jacket. You want a pitch that's as close to your natural posture as possible. Some men angle their shoulders further forward than others. If the bend of your body doesn't come fairly close to matching the bend of your jacket, you'll get tugging and twisting on the sleeve, which will create

wrinkles and pinch your body.

## THE SLEEVE PITCH

---

Good Fit



Bad Fit



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- ***The chest*** should sit close enough that the lapels don't sag or bend away from your body.
- ***The waist*** should button without straining. When fastened, there should be no wrinkles or folds in the fabric around the button. It should hang flat against the front of your shirt, without sagging.

# THE JACKET CLOSURE

**Just Right**



**Too Small**



**Too Big**

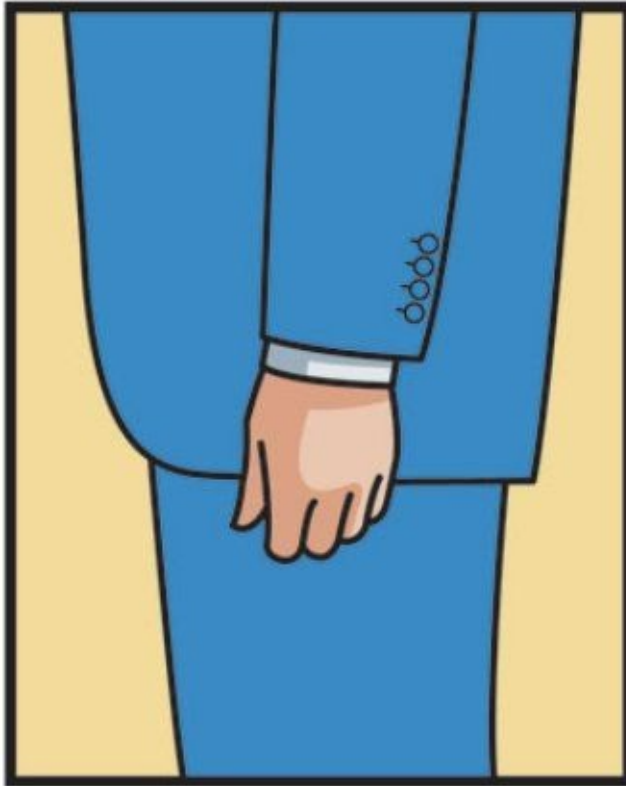


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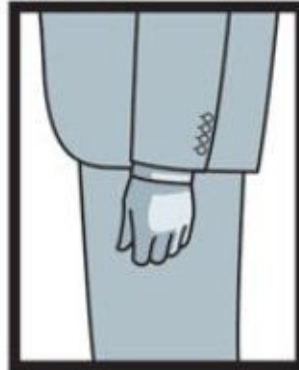
- ***The length*** should end right around the curve of the buttocks, at or just below their widest point. Too far beyond that and the jacket starts to look like an overcoat; too far above it and the back hem with flip outward like a duck tail.

# JACKET LENGTH

Good Fit



Too Short



Too Long

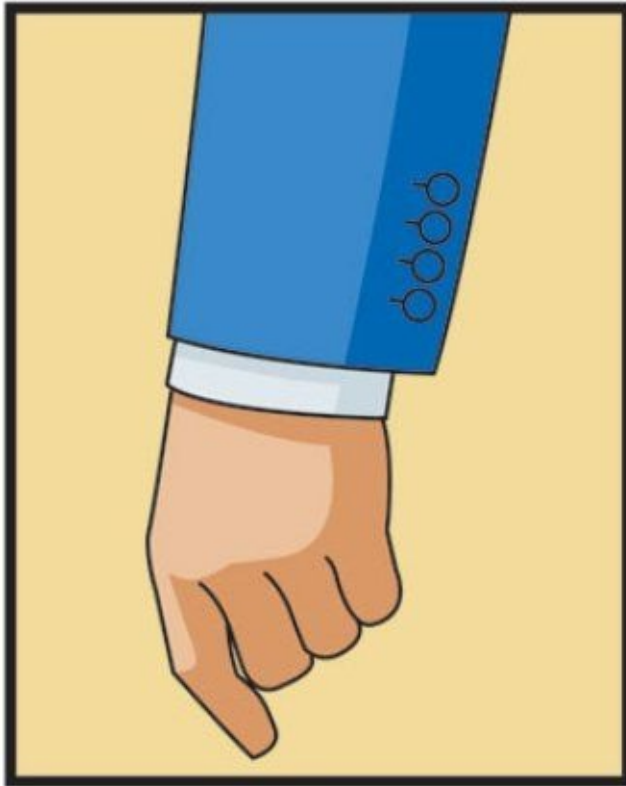


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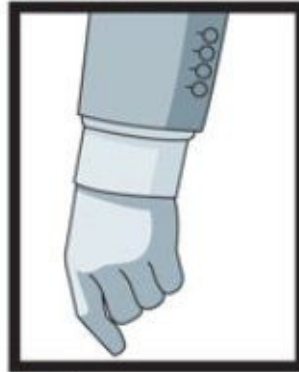
- **The sleeves** should stop at or just above the large bone at the base of your thumb, where the wrist and the hand come together. It should be slightly shorter than your dress shirt sleeves -- "a half inch of linen" is the old-fashioned phrase, and it still holds basically true. The jacket sleeve should never fully hide the shirt cuffs.

# JACKET SLEEVE LENGTH

**Good Fit**



**Too Short**



**Too Long**



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Obviously, very few off the rack suits are going to be a perfect fit in every one of these locations.

The most important (when purchasing off the rack) are the shoulders, armsye, and arm pitch -- those are both challenging and expensive to fix, with no guarantee of good results.

The length of the sleeves and the bottom of the jacket, as well as the fit at the waist, are easier to adjust. Err on the side of too long or too loose, rather than too short and too tight, and your tailor should have enough cloth to work with.

Collar and chest fall somewhere in between. They're somewhat difficult to adjust, but a touch of looseness there isn't the deal-breaker that it can be

elsewhere. Try for the best fit you can, but focus on the shoulders and arms. Without a good fit there, the jacket is never going to sit right on your body.

## Suit Styles

The *fit* refers to the specific measurements of the suit at various points. It's important to get a good fit, tailored to your body, no matter what kind of suit you're wearing.

Styles of suit, on the other hand, are usually broken down by the type of jacket used. There are three basic models in common use today:

- ***Single-breasted suits*** have sides that do not overlap when fastened. They are buttoned in the middle of the torso, usually with a single button (on a two-button jacket) or with two buttons (on a three-button jacket). The lowest button is almost always left unfastened.
- ***Three-piece suits*** are just a single-breasted suit with an added waistcoat (vest) made from the same fabric as the jacket and trousers. They are a little more elegant-looking, but also a touch more old-fashioned, and of course more expensive.
- ***Double-breasted suits*** have two sides that overlap when buttoned, usually with two columns of buttons. They are generally considered more formal than single-breasted suits, and should be worn buttoned at all times.

Within those three broad category is the potential for quite a bit of variety. An aggressively modern single-breasted suit might only have a single button and buttonhole, slung low on the torso, while a more staid version might have three buttons, with two fastening to close the jacket about halfway up the chest.

Double-breasted suits in particular come in a number of different "button stances," to accommodate differently-sized torsos. They are generally described using a "number-on-number" phrase, listing first the number of buttons total and then the number that actually fasten: a "six-on-two" jacket has two columns of three buttons each, but only the lower two buttons on the wearer's right side actually fasten through buttonholes.

## Suit Silhouettes

The general outline of a suit -- called its "silhouette" -- sets the tone for the whole garment.

It effectively gives the wearer his shape. Some silhouettes flatter slimmer or more athletic builds, while others work better for broader men, but in theory a good tailor can make any kind of suit for any kind of man.

It's purely a question of personal taste, and of what looks best for your body.

- ***The European Suit*** is slim and sharp-edged, with crisp, clear lines throughout the body. The shoulders are squared off at the ends, and the armholes are high, giving it a snug fit in the upper torso. The waist is as tapered as the wearer's body will allow. This is a striking style that works best in fine fabrics -- and, if we're being honest, on slender and athletic men. Men whose waists are broader than their chests will struggle to carry the trim lines of a European suit without straining them.
- ***The British Suit*** is boxy and sturdy, with squared-off shoulders but a lower armhole than the European suit. The waist is less tapered, but the hips may be more flared, and the back is usually double-vented (both of which are nods to its origin as riding clothes). British suits look good in thick, sturdy materials, and look equally good on almost any figure or build.
- ***The American Suit***, also frequently called the sack suit, has softer shoulders and a more relaxed chest than its transatlantic counterparts. The armholes are set lower and the sleeves themselves are wider, giving it a more soft-edged shape. The waist tapers a bit, but not aggressively, without the wide hips of a British jacket. Most are single-vented. The style looks good on most men, though very slender men may struggle to carry the looser fit without billowing.

Not all manufacturers use these terms (in fact, most department stores won't, preferring to use their own focus-group tested phrases like "executive fit" or "ambassador fit," most of which are meaningless).

The terms are more useful when talking with tailors, and simply as a way to think about suits for yourself. The key details -- and the choices you'll need to make -- are really the shape of the shoulders, the stance and width of the arms, the amount of taper at the waist, and the amount of flare above and below it.

Find the combination you like. Then find the brand that sells it -- or the tailor who'll make it, if you can afford it.



## Suit Lapels

One of the defining characteristics of the contemporary men's suit jacket is the pair of folded-back lapels on the front of the chest, stitched directly to the collar at the tops of the lapels.

There are really only two options for men's suit lapels, with a third option generally reserved for formal and semiformal clothing: notch lapels, peak lapels, and shawl lapels.

- **Notch lapels** are the most common style (and the easiest to make). The tops of notch lapels are angled downwards, and broader than the ends of the collar, so that when the two are stitched together it creates a "notch" between the two.
- **Peak lapels** completely encompass the ends of the collar, with outward-angled "peaks" framing it. They are generally considered more formal than notch lapels. Most double-breasted jackets have peak lapels.
- **Shawl lapels** are also called a *shawl collar*, for the simple reason that it's all one piece: there is only a single, continuous strip of folded-over fabric, which runs all the way around the neck and down the front of the chest until the lapels taper off. The shawl collar is typically reserved for dinner jackets, and is considered fashion-forward and not business-appropriate when it appears on suits.

The width of lapels has varied with fashions over the years. For a balanced look, the outermost point on the lapel should fall at or just short of the midway point between the inner edge of the collar and the outer edge of the shoulder.

Significantly skinnier or wider than that becomes a fashion statement -- and one that's likely to become dated quickly.

## Suit Pockets

It may seem like a small detail, but the style of the pockets on the front of a suit jacket affects its formality and its overall "flavor" quite a bit.

Some make a more dramatic statement than others. In general, the subtler the pocket, the more formal it is considered:

- **Jetted pockets** are fully interior, with only a small lined slit visible on the front of the jacket. They are used for the dressiest suits (especially



those with slim, European-style jackets), and are also mandatory on formal and semiformal jackets.

- **Patch pockets** are sewn onto the exterior, rather than the interior of the jacket. The whole pocket is a single, flat shape with an opening at the top. Plain patch pockets are standard for blazers, but can appear on suits as well.
- **Flap pockets** have a downward-facing flap covering the opening. A flap can be put on any sort of pocket, and always reduces the formality a bit. Most business suits have flap pockets, either jetted or patch.
- **Accordion pockets** (also called *bellows* pockets) are patch pockets with an extra, pleated strip of fabric separating the front of the pocket from the jacket. This allows the pocket to expand, and is generally only seen on casual sports jackets. The only suits to feature accordion pockets are typically tweed hunting outfits and other upper-class British sporting menswear.

In addition to the large pockets on the lower front of the suit, nearly all suit jackets come with a jetted pocket on the left breast. This is where the pocket square belongs, and it should always have one -- there's no reason to leave that pocket empty (or, worse, to stow something like your pen or your eyeglasses in it).

## Suit Trousers

The vast majority of a suit's details pertain to its jacket. But what about the other half of the suit?

The matching trousers are basically a pair of dress slacks. Many men will in fact wear the trousers from some of their suits as unmatched trousers on some occasions, and there's nothing wrong with the practice so long as the suit jacket is still seeing a comparable amount of wear. If one piece is worn considerably more than the other, especially in the sun, it's possible to fade the more frequently-worn piece until it no longer matches.

Some tailors offer a second set of trousers for a small additional charge when they custom-make a suit. It is almost always a good investment -- trousers do tend to wear out more quickly than jackets, and the spare set can be worn as slacks from time to time as well.

The defining characteristics of suit trousers are fairly basic:

- High waists -- trousers should sit at the natural waist (the narrowest point between the ribs and the hips), not down on the hips themselves. As a general rule of thumb, if you can pull the trousers on and off without fully unzipping them, they're too large.
- No cuffs -- trousers should be hemmed without cuffs. Visible cuffs are too informal for a suit.
- Pleats are optional, but generally discouraged. They break up the smooth lines of the suit and draw attention to the waist and thighs, which is not where you want it.
- The legs should be hemmed so that there is a slight "break" -- the bottom hem should rest lightly on the tops of your dress shoes, creating a very subtle bunching in the fabric around the ankle.

Suits are sold with the legs cut deliberately long. It's assumed that you'll take them into a tailor's to have them hemmed in person, wearing your dress shoes so that the measurements are accurate. Don't skip this step! Baggy, unaltered hems tell everyone that you're a menswear novice.



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## Business Suits vs. Social Suits

The last important detail of men's suits to study is their social role and function.

While the most common use of suits these days is as high-formality attire for business or significant occasions, matched suits can be worn casually as well.

The key is to know the difference.

Business suits are meant to appear, if not somber, at least relatively sober. The most formal are always charcoal gray, navy blue, or black. Less strict business suits can have a bit of pattern, such as light pinstripes or rail stripes, or a textured weave like birdseye or herringbone. At the most relaxed end of business wear, colors like brown, khaki, and lighter blues and grays are tolerated.

These are restrained garments, meant to be worn with neckties and light-colored dress shirts.

Social suits, in contrast, are almost always light-colored, with medium grays, blues, and earth tones about the darkest they usually get. Nearly all will have some kind of patterning, ranging from textured weaves to bold plaids or candy stripes.

It should always be clear at a glance which you are wearing. Don't wear a social suit to a business meeting, and don't wear a business suit to a church brunch.

If you have a suit that's somewhere in the middle ground -- dark brown hopsack, say, which could serve as either a business suit in a relaxed suit-and-tie environment or a purely social item for a well-dressed man -- use your shirt and tie as social cues. A colored and patterned shirt with an open collar makes it a social suit, while a lightly-patterned or pure white shirt with a necktie makes it business attire.

In this day and age, social suits are rare. That doesn't make them a bad choice, however -- if the idea of wearing one tickles your fancy, buy the nicest one you can and wear the hell out of it. Just be aware that, to most men, the suit is purely a business necessity, and that you will stand out in the crowd whenever you wear one casually.

## CHAPTER 24: MEN'S JACKETS

The previous chapter ("Men's Suits") does a good job describing the particulars of men's suit jackets.

Most of that information applies to "odd jackets" as well -- the broad term used to describe any suit-style jacket worn without matching trousers.

The fit of blazers and sports jackets does not differ substantially from the fit of suit jackets. All your jackets should sit close to the body, without pinching (too tight) or sagging (too loose).

The differences, instead, lie in the materials, the stylistic details, and -- more than anything -- what else you wear with the jackets.

### Terminology: Blazers vs. Sports Jackets vs. Suit Jackets

Hopefully we can clear up some uncertainty right at the outset here: although the terms are sometimes used interchangeably, blazers, sports jackets, and suit jackets are three distinct things.

You may also hear "sportcoat" and "suitcoat" used from time to time -- those are just synonyms for sports jackets and suit jackets, respectively. They're not separate styles of jacket. Technically, "coat" is inaccurate, but the terms have been around so long that the genie's never getting back in the bottle.

#### *Blazers*

Of the three, blazer jackets are the most strictly defined style, with the least room for artistic interpretation.

A descendent of naval uniforms, blazers are square, boxy jackets with patch pockets. Most are made from worsted wool serge, a dense weave with a very faintly ribbed surface.

Navy blue is far and away the most common color for blazers. Other solid colors make up most of the alternatives -- apart from some striped novelty items for carnival barkers and sports team boosters, blazers are rarely patterned.

Metallic buttons are traditional, but not mandatory. Men who prefer a lower-contrast look can easily find blazers with mother-of-pearl or plastic buttons dyed the same navy blue as the jacket.

Overall, blazers are a conservative item. They can be worn socially or for business, and are very easy to dress up or down. At their most formal, they can be paired with gray slacks, a white shirt, and a necktie for something just shy of a business suit. At their most casual, they can go with jeans and an open collar. But in either role, they're going to be a little more upscale-looking and a little less relaxed than a sports jacket would be.

### *Sports Jackets*

The biggest differences between blazers and sports jackets are the structure and the material.

Sports jackets are soft-shouldered and less boxy than blazers, with an unstructured shape that drapes over the body. Most are made from casual, textured fabrics like tweed and corduroy.

While they can be worn with dress slacks and neckties, sports jackets are just as likely to be paired with open collars or non-dress shirt options like sweaters and cotton knits. The detailing tends toward the casual: flap pockets, elbow patches, and so on.

Patterns can range from solid to bright plaid. Earth tones are common (especially in the tweedier, more country-gentleman style of jacket). Buttons are frequently leather, horn, or another natural material.

It's a versatile category that can include a lot of things -- but that definitely *doesn't* include the structured fit or dark, solid austerity of a blazer.

### *Suit Jackets*

We've already covered the suit jacket in detail in the previous chapter, but it's important to draw a distinction here between jackets borrowed from suits -- which can, sometimes, be worn without the matching trousers -- and sports jackets and blazers.

It's tempting to think of all your suits as not just suits, but also a spare pair of dress slacks and a spare sports jacket whenever you want one.

To some extent, you can. But there are a couple of caveats: first, you always need to wear the jacket and the trousers roughly the same amount, so that they don't fade into a mismatch.

Second, only some suit jackets will serve the purpose. It needs to look convincingly like a casual jacket when it's worn without the matching trousers,

and some just won't fit the bill. Anything very somber, for example, is going to be tough to pull off, as are formal business looks like peak lapels and double-breasted suits.

A slim, simple, single-breasted suit jacket can work well. Pair it with something aggressively casual and you get a nice contrast: a plain black or charcoal suit jacket with dark, fitted jeans is a common evening look for guys who want to look both nice and a little bit rebellious.

You can, of course, think ahead when you purchase your suits, and opt for styles that you *know* will work as sports jackets as well, and that go well with trousers you already have in your wardrobe. That goes right back to the all-important idea of interchangeability -- and it's a good plan.

## How to Wear an Odd Jacket

Unmatched jackets are one of the easiest -- and best -- casual styles available to men.

You can throw one on over pretty much everything to dress it up.

Different looks call for slightly different styles of jacket. A pair of well broken-in jeans with a battered old corduroy sports jacket looks comfortable and working-class; the same jeans with an ultrafine suit jacket in a sleek cut looks more like a rock and roller's stage outfit (especially if you throw some colored canvas sneakers in there).

But generally speaking, there aren't many casual outfits that don't benefit from an odd jacket of *some* kind.

Some common examples of looks you can create with a jacket:

- *The basic formula* -- neat trousers, sports jacket or blazer; collared dress shirt. Simple, above reproach, and just a touch nicer than most men bother to look during their off-hours. Casual leather shoes complete the look.
- *The country gentry look* -- a nice tweedy jacket and some earth tone trousers, with a dress shirt and possibly a vest or a light sweater underneath. Goes well with dress boots.
- *The rockabilly* -- blue jeans, a dark blazer or suit jacket, and a Western shirt or white dress shirt. Cowboy boots a must.

- *The runway star* -- bright-colored trousers, fitted T-shirt or other non-collared shirt, and a dark blazer. Add a bracelet or a watch to make it clear that it's a complete, coordinated outfit you've put some thought into.
- *The California suit* -- light dress trousers, a navy blazer, and a dress shirt and tie. Leather dress shoes and a matching belt complete the look. Just one small step down from a business suit in formality.

Your options are pretty much limitless, in other words, especially once you start throwing in underlayers beyond the basic collared dress shirt.

Own a lot of jackets, if you can. You'll never regret having them.

Thrift stores are a great source, if you're on a budget -- they've almost always got a bunch of old, oddly patterned ones that no one's thought to buy. Get ones that come close to a good fit, have them adjusted, and suddenly you've got a closet full of ways to make a basic jeans/collared shirt outfit look more unique.

Remember, however, that even a good blazer and slacks do not make a substitute for a business suit. They make a good, slightly more casual alternative, but if you're ever uncertain which to wear, err on the side of the suit.

You can, after all, always take a necktie off or shed a suit jacket to dress the look down a little if it's too much. If a sports jacket is too casual, on the other hand, there's nothing you can do to dress it up any further.



## CHAPTER 25: MEN'S SHIRTS

For a well-dressed man, the default shirt is a *dress shirt*.

That term implies a couple of things:

- long sleeves
- a turndown collar with points on each side of the face
- cuffs distinct from the sleeve
- a front placket with buttonholes (and corresponding buttons beneath)
- a collar button above the placket , at the base of the collar

Most will also include a left breast pocket, but it is not required.

There are, of course, many alternatives to the basic dress shirt. We will cover those briefly at the end of this chapter. However, it is the traditional dress shirt that should be a well-dressed man's default option, and so it is to the dress shirt that we devote the most attention.



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## Dress Shirt Fit

As with any piece of clothing, the fit of the dress shirt is the most important consideration. Plan on having yours adjusted -- very few off-the-rack shirts fit well without at least a little tailoring. Minor adjustments to the sleeves and waist will only cost \$15-20 dollars or so, and they make a vast difference in how the shirt looks.

Use the following benchmarks for a good shirt fit:

- ***The collar*** should touch the skin on the back of your neck even when unbuttoned. When buttoned, it should touch the skin all the way around. However, your throat should not feel constricted -- the button should rest very lightly at or near your Adam's apple, without any uncomfortable tightness. There's never a reason to wear a shirt that pinches when the collar is buttoned! It looks bad, and it feels awful.
- ***Collar height*** should be proportional to your neck -- a lower collar for shorter necks, and a higher collar for longer necks. When wearing a jacket, about 1/2" of shirt collar should be visible above the jacket collar.
- ***The sleeves*** should come all the way up the wrist, covering the large bone at the base of the thumb. When wearing a jacket, you again want a half-inch of shirt visible beyond the end of the jacket sleeves.
- ***The yoke*** (the panel across the top of the shirt's back) should stretch all the way from shoulder to shoulder. If the yoke is too short, it will pull on the sleeves, causing them to twist and wrinkle. If it is too long, the shirt's shoulders will sag.
- ***The waist*** should follow the contours of your body. If your waist narrows below your rib cage, get the sides of the shirt taken in -- don't let them hang slack. A billowing midsection makes you look sloppy and fatter than you are. If you need the extra room, of course, leave it in there.
- ***The bottom hem*** should be long enough that all of it can be tucked into your trousers at least an inch or two. On a shirt with "tails" (curved hems rather than straight), pay attention to the seam where the front and back come together near your hips. That's the highest point on your hem -- if it can tuck in all the way, the rest of the shirt

will be fine. If it can't, it'll pop up out of your trousers when you move, creating an ugly gap on each of your sides.

Most off-the-rack shirts are measured using two numbers: the collar size and the sleeve length. Since that doesn't tell you a thing about how the shoulders, yoke, waist, and hem fit, shirt shopping is often an exercise in finding the brands that use proportions similar to yours, and then having a tailor make the final adjustments after the purchase.

## Shirt Collar Styles

Parts of your shirt will often be hidden beneath jackets and sweaters, but the collar will always be visible.

Because it creates the frame for your face, the shirt collar is one of the most important details of your outfit. (Think about paintings, if it helps: a small, delicate painting looks absurd in a massive, chunky frame, right? Same with faces and collars.)

You want to pick both a style and a size that suits your face. There are also a few issues of formality to take into account, but these days they only come into play in the strictest settings -- most of the time, any collar will be socially acceptable.

### *Point Collars*

The simplest and most common type of shirt collar is the point collar. This is a collar that simply ends in triangular points, usually about two and a half inches long at their widest edge.

These are versatile and unobjectionable. You can wear them with anything, outside of black tie and white tie settings.

Men with smaller, narrower faces benefit from a smaller "spread" (the distance between the collar points). However, this limits the kinds of tie knots that can be used -- a large knot inside a small collar spread will distort the collar.

Choose the width that flatters your face best, and then select and tie your neckties accordingly.

### *Spread Collars*

Also called an English spread, this is essentially a point collar with a greater-than-90 degree angle between the collar points.

The sides of the collar tend to be a bit shorter than on a point collar, so that

they're not spreading all the way out to your shoulders, which makes this a good choice for men with stout, wide faces.

Spread collars demand large tie knots to fill them. Use something along the lines of a Windsor, or else wear a very thick tie. A small, compact tie knot in the middle of a spread collar can make your face look very oversized. It's almost a clownish look -- not flattering at all.

### ***Button-down Collars***

To clear up any misconceptions: the phrase "button down" properly refers to the collar style, where the points are fastened to the shirtfront with small buttons at the tips. A dress shirt is not a "button down" without those collar buttons -- but the phrase is so common that some confused men associate it with the front of the dress shirt, which "buttons down" the placket, rather with the collar.

They are wrong. A button-down shirt is one with a button-down collar, period.

The style is comfortable, practical, and casual. It is usually associated with softer collars, rather than stiffly-starched collar points. It is not appropriate at the highest levels of business formality, but Americans have become so fond of the style that it is often worn with suits these days.

You would probably do *better* to wear your button-down shirts with sweaters and sports coats, but style manuals that tell you they can never be worn with suits are showing their age. Use your own judgment -- just switch to a point or spread collar when you need a "serious business" look.

### ***Club Collars***

An uncommon style these days, club collars are similar to a spread collar, but with rounded lobes instead of triangular points.

They were originally a collegiate and schoolboy style in England, and have associations with the East Coast prep scene in American culture. These days, they are mostly seen on bankers and other men who are required to wear suits every day, but not at the strictest levels of business formality.

Wear them when you want a unique style -- but be aware that they do have upper-middle class associations, and may seem a bit frumpy and old-fashioned to modern eyes.

### ***Contrast Collars***

Technically, any of the styles above can be a "contrast collar." The phrase simply

means a shirt whose collars (and usually cuffs) are not the same color as the body.

The look harkens back to the days of detachable shirt cuffs and collars. Those saw more wear and tear than the rest of the shirt, and needed laundering more often, so practical housewives and maids favored detachable pieces that could be washed on their own.

These days, when washing is a minor inconvenience at best, collars are usually attached even when contrasting. It's purely an aesthetic style that adds a bit of contrast to the shirt. White collars with a solid-colored shirt body is the most common style, but others are possible.

The added colors dress the shirt down a bit, making contrast collars another good option for business-casual and for men in suits who want a slightly more relaxed look than the strictest business attire. They should not be worn to high-formality business events like interviews and presentations.

### *Pin Collars*

At this point we're getting fairly esoteric. Most men will go their whole lives without ever seeing a pin collar shirt, much less wearing or buying one.

That said, it's a style that appeals to some men. If you're one of them, give it a try. You might just fall in love.

The pin collar is essentially a point collar, but with small slits and an accompanying metal pin. The pin slides through the collar, holding the points closer together than their natural spread.

This style is always meant to be worn with a necktie. A pin collar without one looks silly. The tie goes over the pin, which lifts it slightly up and forward. It's a dressy style, and goes best with suits, though you could pull it off with a blazer and conservative trousers.

### *Tab Collars*

Like pin collars, these are verging on obsolete, but still appeal to a few dedicated fans. Each side of the collar has a small cloth tab, which button together to pull the collar very flat.

It's a good style for men who are fond of their neckties, and want them to really pop out at people. Beyond that, it's mostly a novelty these days -- good for feeling like you're a fancy dresser, but not significantly different from a regular

point collar on any practical level.

Because the tabs pull the collar points in tight, the style works best on men with narrow faces. Broad-faced men should stick to something with a wider spread.

## Shirt Cuffs

By definition, dress shirts have cuffs that are distinct from the sleeve. The cuffs are usually made from the same fabric as the rest of the shirt, set at a right angle to the sleeve (this is most visible in patterned fabrics -- if there are vertical lines running down the sleeve, for example, the same lines will run horizontally around the cuffs).

Cuff styles are referred to by a muddle of sometimes-overlapping terms, made worse by the fact that some designers use them differently than others. But basically all you need to know boils down to this: whether it's a single or a double cuff, and whether the cuff has a built-in button or not.

- *Single cuffs* are the more common style: a single band of fabric at the end of the sleeve. These are also sometimes called *barrel cuffs*.
- *Double cuffs* are long enough to fold back on themselves, creating two bands of fabric around the wrist. They usually -- but not always -- take cufflinks or chains, rather than having built in buttons.

Broadly speaking, cuffs with buttons are seen as less formal than cuffs with links. In business wear, double cuffs are seen as more formal than single, but single cuffs are still preferred (indeed, mandatory) for true formalwear.

There are a few more esoteric styles out there, such as the portofino cuffs popularized by the early *James Bond* films (a sort of cutaway version of a buttoning double cuff, worn at cocktail events with fine suits and semiformal tuxedos). For the most part, these are novelties -- acceptable when you want to play the dandy a bit in social settings, but not for professional settings.

## Shirt Pockets

Most dress shirts feature a single pocket on the upper left chest.

Think of these as vestigial, and resist the urge to put things in them when you're dressing nicely. If you're out on a job site taking notes on a clipboard or something, fine -- stick a pen in the pocket if you must. But by and large, avoid the "nerdy engineer" look by keeping the shirt pocket empty.

For dress shirts, stick with a basic patch pocket, open at the top. Pocket flaps relax the look of the shirt considerably, and should be saved for work shirts, Western shirts, and other casual styles.

## Monograms

Most higher-end dress shirts (including the nicer ready-to-wear brands) include the option of a monogram.

These were originally a necessity, or at least a major convenience. Before laundry machines were a standard in-home appliance, one of the most common ways to have your shirts washed was at a professional laundress's, where they were thrown in mass tubs with dozens or hundreds of other shirts. The monograms made sorting easy.

Since that's no longer relevant -- even if you take your shirts to a dry cleaner's for pressing, they're almost certainly going to be bagged and tagged individually -- the monogram is a bit of an anachronism. Its main purpose these days is to indicate to people that your shirt is of good quality.

That makes it a touch flashy; even a bit pretentious. A prominent location like the edge of the cuff or the tip of the collar makes it seem like you're trying too hard.

If you feel the need for a monogram, keep it small, tasteful, and ideally out of sight. Just above the cuff on the sleeve is a good spot -- a jacket's sleeve will hide a monogram placed there, so that it can only be seen when the jacket is removed. That makes you seem modest when you remove the jacket and the monogram becomes visible.

Similarly, keep the monogram limited to your initials: one, two, or three letters, without framing curlicues or symbols. A basic cursive, copperplate, or newsprint-style font looks better than anything elaborate or gothic.

And at the end of the day, if you really want to look elegant, skip the monogram. Let the quality of your shirt speak for itself. Or, if you occasionally need the labeling, but don't want to make a show of it, have the shirt monogrammed at the bottom hem, inside or out, where no one will see it unless they're a cleaner who's looking for it.

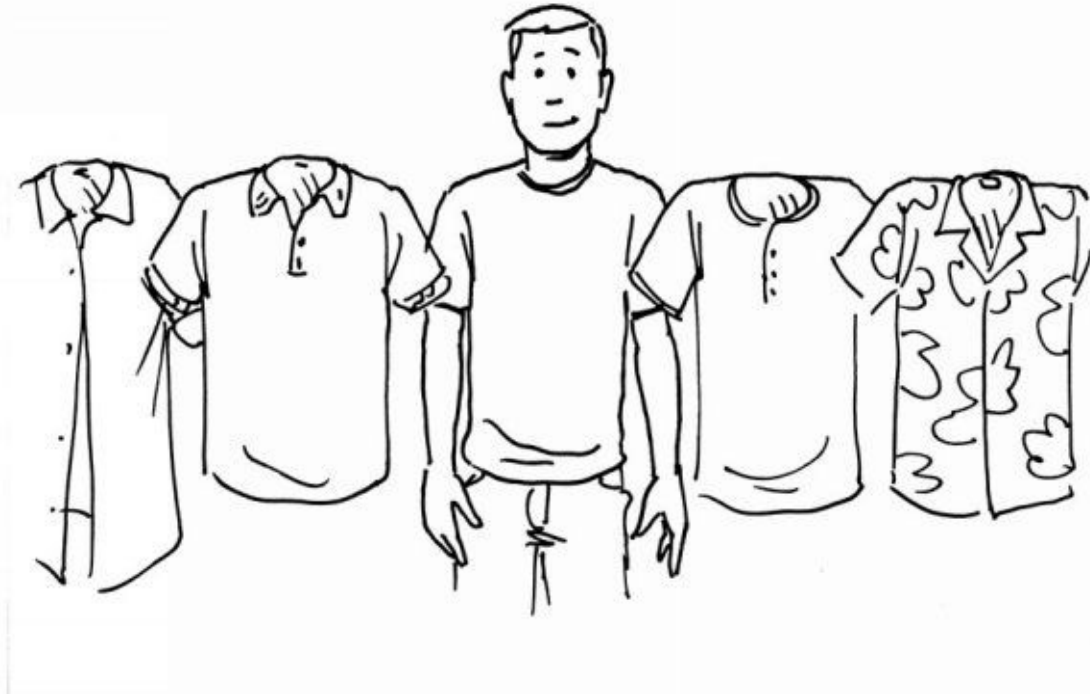
## Beyond the Dress Shirt - Other Shirt Styles

The basic men's dress shirt is a great default. It looks good with almost anything



-- if you own a couple in white, a couple in light blue, and a couple patterned ones, you can make just about all your outfits work with them.

That said, variety is never bad for the wardrobe. You start to look a little bland if all you ever wear are long-sleeved, collared shirts.



Once you've got a good core of dress shirts, try out some other styles as well:

- **Work Shirts** - The same basic construction a dress shirt, but made of sturdier material (cotton flannel is the most common). Many have pockets on both breasts rather than one, and flaps on the pockets. Relaxed, comfortable, and practical, but not as classy as a dress shirt.
- **Short Sleeved Work Shirts** - Think auto mechanics, and you've got the style. Soft turndown collar, buttoning front, and enough length to tuck it in even though most guys don't. Good for working-class cred, but do us all a favor and don't wear grease-stained ones or ones with nametag patches outside of your actual workplace.
- **Cotton Knits** - Short-sleeved, it's a T-shirt. Long-sleeved, it's a knit, a long-sleeved T-shirt, a lightweight pullover -- no one agrees on the name. But whatever you call it, in plain monochrome it makes a nice, neutral layer. Make sure the fit is snug right up against the skin, with no billowing or sagging.

- **Polo Shirts** - Dimpled, short-sleeved shirts with soft collars. Solid colors and stripes are fine; corporate logos are not, unless you're on the job at that company. Wearing them under a sports jacket or blazer is aggressively preppy. Tucking them in is frumpy. On their own, with some decent khakis, they're perfect.
- **Sweaters** - Lightweight sweaters are versatile layering pieces. Wear them over a shirt with a visible collar, under a jacket, or both -- you've got options here. Just keep them light, close-fitted, and solid-colored, with maybe an argyle or some light striping thrown in now and then if you're feeling bold.
- **Safari Shirts** - Soft turndown collars, lots of pockets, and a breathable, lightweight material make these the tropical vacationer's garment of choice. Short sleeved versions exist, but get long sleeves with a buttoning sleeve tab so that you can roll them down for environmental and sun protection.
- **Guayabera** - A South American classic. Ignore the irreverent name "Mexican Wedding Shirt" and try one out in a light color, with some pleats and embroidery jazzing up the front. They look sharper than northerners tend to realize at first.
- **Tshirts** - There's a time and a place for everything. A plain-colored, tight-fitted T-shirt with jeans isn't dressy, but it can look pretty good if you've got the body to pull it off. If you don't, steer clear of the tee, or use it only as an underlayer.

You'll find shirts that sort of fall into the gaps here -- Hawaiian shirts, for example, are basically a short-sleeved work shirt's construction, but the patterned fabric turns them into their own unique category. Similarly, a "Henley" shirt is just a cotton knit with a slightly different collar style than the ubiquitous T-shirt.

Build the collection that suits your taste. Just be aware that the basic dress shirt is always going to be the simplest and most versatile option. If you want something respectable but neutral, go with the dress shirt, especially when you've got other "show" pieces like colorful trousers or a patterned jacket.

And, as with anything other item, spend your money on fit first, and all other considerations second. The shirt is the closest layer to your body most of the time -- it should follow the contours of that body comfortably.

## CHAPTER 26: MEN'S SWEATERS

When a jacket is too dressy, and shirtsleeves are too plain, the sweater offers a comfortable middle ground.

That's only the beginning of their role in men's fashion, of course. For all the damage that "ugly Christmas sweater" parties and catalog images of bland, suburban-looking men have done to the sweater's reputation, the long-sleeved knit garment is an impressively versatile fashion tool.



## Materials and Construction

Unlike jackets and shirts, there aren't a lot of technical details to go into with sweaters. The key consideration (and the driving factor in cost) is the raw material and the style of knit.

- **Cashmere** is the luxury fabric of sweaters. It's soft, lightweight, and warm, offering insulation without bulk. However, buyers need to exercise caution -- the industry is not well-regulated, and many "cashmere blend" sweaters contain a very small percentage of true Kashmir goat hairs, with the rest of the blend made from regular sheep's wool.
- **Angora**, taken from the fur of the angora rabbit, is another luxury material. Unlike cashmere, blending is not necessarily a sign of low quality. Pure angora hair is too light and fragile for sweaters; a blend of 30-50% angora mixed with sheep's wool is typical.
- **Mohair** has fallen from favor somewhat because of its coarseness, but it offers excellent warmth with a very light weight. That makes it one of the most functional materials for outdoors sweaters -- not as fashionable, but very useful in cold climates.
- **Alpaca** fiber, and to a lesser extent llama fiber, are both also used in sweaters. The hair is softer than sheep's wool, and contains no lanolin, a fatty compound that triggers some skin allergies.
- **Merino** is a breed of sheep and a popular type of sweater wool. It's thicker than cashmere, but offers excellent warmth, and is still soft against the skin.

Other sweaters use wools from different breeds of sheep, or else are made from knit cotton yarns. Cotton sweaters are easy to care for, but lack the insulation or water resistance of wool.

Some sweaters are sold with reference to the number of "plies," as in 1-ply, 2-ply, *etc.* The number tells you how many individual strands were twisted together to make the yarns used in weaving the sweater. Each ply adds weight, so that a 2-ply sweater is twice as heavy as a 1-ply sweater, and so on.

The term has more to do with marketing than any practical difference. 2-ply yarns have a balanced and stable shape, which will add to the sweater's durability, but beyond that it is mostly a matter of weight. 1-ply sweaters are

good lightweight layers for outdoor activity in mild weather. 2-ply sweaters are what most of us would think of as "normal," and you'll sometimes see 3-ply or 4-ply yarns used in large, bulky sweaters.

## Sweater Styles

It's worth owning a couple different sweaters in a couple different styles, just for the versatility it adds to your wardrobe. It may not seem all that significant, but a solid-colored V-neck sweater sends a very different message from a striped polo sweater.

Any or all of these are worth having in your collection:

- **Crew neck** sweaters are the modern default: a plain knit body with a round neck opening. The ring around the collar is slightly thicker than the rest of the sweater, and usually ribbed. It's a good, neutral building block for layered outfits.
- **V-neck** sweaters have, as the name implies, a triangular opening at the neck. They're a good style for pairing with collared dress shirts, especially if you're wearing a necktie. The opening frames the tie knot nicely.
- **Turtleneck** sweaters have a high, soft collar that turns down once, doubling over to make a thick ring around the neck. They're a casual style, and look best in a trim fit and dark, solid colors.
- **Polo** sweaters have the same pointed turndown collar and short front opening as a polo shirt. They make a good dress-casual option, but don't pair well with dress shirts. Wear them with a collarless shirt to keep from piling too many layers and folds of cloth up at your neck.
- **Cable-knit** sweaters (also called fisherman's sweaters) have decorative patterns woven into the body of the sweater. They tend to be bulky and warm, and make good outer layers.
- **Cardigans** have an opening all the way up the front. Most close with a zipper, but buttoning versions exist too. Large, round buttons are considered a bit feminine, and most men prefer wooden toggles or a zipper. These make an excellent casual alternative to a sports jacket or blazer.

Patterning can vary widely. Solid color sweaters are the most versatile, and work

well in layered outfits. Bulkier sweaters worn as outer layers often have patterns in the weave, ranging from solid-color knotwork to elaborate diamond and dot patterns.

## Sweaters in Your Wardrobe

If you're unsure what to do with sweaters, start them off in two basic roles: as middle layers between a dress shirt and a sports jacket, and as outer layers on cool days when a winter coat is still overkill.

For the former role, you'll want thin, lightweight sweaters in solid colors. Cashmere and light cotton knits work well here.

For the latter, thicker knits and heavier yarns work best. Since it's the outer layer, the sweater can feature more color or pattern.

Use them to break things up any time you feel like you're getting repetitive. Sweaters mean never having to be the guy who only wears blazers, or only shirtsleeves and neckties, or any other habitual pattern.

Of course, you don't want to be the guy who wears sweaters every day either. But it's a nice alternative to jackets and dress shirts, and if you've got all three in play, you're unlikely to be the most boring dresser in your social circles.

## CHAPTER 27: MEN'S TROUSERS

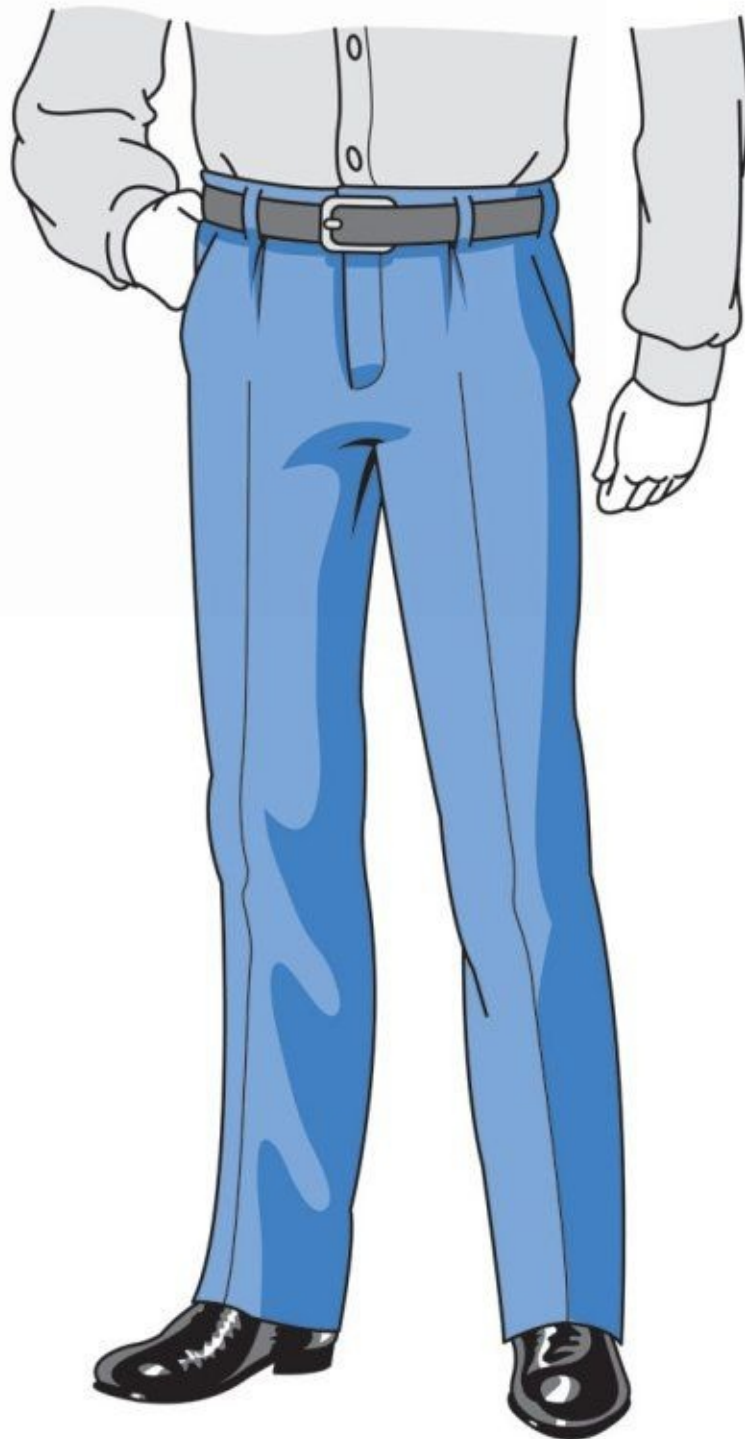
Moving down the body from our previous chapters, we come to the mysterious world of men's trousers.

This discussion comes after our coverage of jackets and shirts, and for a reason: trousers are *generally* one of the most neutral parts of an outfit. They don't need as much thought as shirts and jackets because there quite frankly aren't as many options consider.

Does that mean you can throw any old thing on your lower body and look good? Of course not. As with everything else, there are going to be some subtleties for you to consider here.

Happily, we've considered them for you.





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## Proper Trouser Fit

If you've been basing your trouser purchases off the terms shops and manufacturers use to size them, you've probably had some frustrating experience.

Is a slim fit different from a skinny fit? Are low rise slacks supposed to sit lower than high rise jeans? Who decides these things, anyway?

The simple answer is that no one does. Most written terms are made up entirely by the manufacturer or store. You're better off relying on numeric measurements -- and on a good understanding of how well-fitted trousers are actually supposed to sit on your body.

- Dress trousers and slacks should fasten around your true waist, well above the hips. You want the front of the trousers to drape over any belly curve you might have, and fall straight down from there.
- Jeans can be worn a little lower, but the waistband should still sit above your hips, rather than wrapping around them. Resting right on top of the hip bones is fine; lower than that and you're in serious danger of plumber's crack.
- The center of the crotch seam (where the legs come together with the upper part of the trousers) should fit snugly against your body. You want enough room to move comfortably, and not much more. Sagging cloth in the crotch looks terrible on anybody.
- Trouser legs should taper slightly from the thigh to the knee, so that you don't have excess cloth around the knee. Below that, they can continue to taper slightly or stay the same width, but legs should never flare back out noticeably.
- The legs should be just long enough that the hem rests lightly on the top of your shoes. That means buying pants with some idea of how you're going to wear them, and with what -- jeans worn low on the hips that go with thick work boots are going to need a different length than slacks worn high on the waist that go with thin loafers.

Really, a good trouser fit is the easiest to judge, if sometimes the hardest to find: you should have freedom of movement, with no billows, sags, or wrinkles.

Easier said than done. Most off-the-rack trousers are cut much too large in the

seat and thighs these days -- manufacturers want as many customers as possible to be able to "fit" into the pants, even if it's a terrible fit.

Be patient, and try things on in person. Discard bad options ruthlessly until you find a brand and a cut (or a style, or a fit, or whatever they've termed it) that sits well on you. Then buy those pants -- and get them tailor-adjusted for a perfect fit.



## Trouser Cuffs

The choice between trousers with a visible, doubled cuff and trousers with a smooth hem is a fairly easy one.

Cuffs are, without exception, the less formal option. They're designed for

practicality, not for looks: the doubled cuff resists wear and tear longer than a single edge, and a tattered cuff can easily be folded over just a touch further and stitched back into place to create a brand-new, unfrayed cuff.

Jeans, khakis, chinos, and other casual trousers typically have visible cuffs. You can get them removed and have the pants hemmed without a cuff, if you want to and the trousers have enough extra length, but jeans in particular will look a little odd without the cuff.

Dress slacks usually do *not* have cuffs, nor do suit trousers. They're not technically inappropriate on a casual suit worn for social purposes, but they'll still look out of place.

Be aware that most slacks, especially ones from more upscale brands, are sold unhemmed with the assumption that you will take them to a tailor for a custom adjustment (some stores will do the adjustment in-house). You're never supposed to take them home and wear them as-is. The legs will be much too long, unless you're very tall for your size range, and the unhemmed edge will fray easily.

Take anything that doesn't come with a cuff already in place to a tailor's, and have them adjusted to your measurement while wearing the kind of shoes you're going to regularly wear with the trousers.

## **Trouser Pleats**

Fashion writers love to argue about pleats, because it's an argument that can never be settled. Trouser pleats are going to come in and out of fashion over the years, no matter what we do or say about the look.

Here's the simple approach: don't get pleated trousers unless you want the specific benefit of pleats.

That benefit is, basically, the ability to add flexibility and stretch to the front of your trousers. If you're a very heavyset or muscular man who has a lot of width between the trouser waist and the thighs, pleats can help keep the front of the trousers a little smaller than they would need to be to allow you freedom of movement without pleats.

Beyond that, they don't serve much purpose, and they're a needless bit of visual clutter. So don't bother, unless your lap area runs toward the broad and you find unpleated trousers too constricting.

## **Suspenders vs. Belts**

You can wear either suspenders or a belt with most pairs of trousers.

What you should never wear is both, or nothing at all. Have exactly *one* type of support for your pants, whatever they may be.

Belts are the default for most men, and they work fine -- match the color of the belt to the color of your shoes, and the color of the buckle to the color of any other metals in your outfit, and you're good to go. (Broad families are fine here: if the shoes are brown and the belt is brown you're fine; they don't have to be the exact same *shade* of brown).

Suspenders are less common, but they're worth trying out, especially for high-riding dress slacks. They give the trousers a smoother drape than a belt -- there's no cinching at the waist, which can cause wrinkles, and the trouser front is held off the body just a tiny bit, so that it falls almost like a curtain in front of your body.

The best suspenders will have leather tabs with buttons on them, which attach to corresponding tabs on the inside of the trouser waist. Suspenders with metal clips will work with any sort of pants, but they are less dressy, and also harder on the trouser fabric.

Formal trousers always require suspenders, and only the tab-style kind should be used with them. Belts and clip-style suspenders will never pass muster with formal or semiformal attire.



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## Trouser Styles

The terminology of men's trouser styles can get confused. Not everyone is clear on the difference between khakis and chinos, for example, and reading a blog post about the history of the words -- while interesting -- doesn't really help with trouser shopping.

Without diving too deep into any backstories or trivia here, we can take a look at the major families of trousers, and let men go from there:

- ***Suit trousers*** are exactly what they sound like. If you have a jacket, and there are accompanying trousers made from the same fabric, those are suit trousers. Nearly all are the same style as dress slacks, and can potentially be worn as such without the accompanying suit (but be careful not to overwear the trousers to the point that they fade more than the jacket).
- ***Dress slacks*** are evocatively named: they hang slack, with a smooth drape all the way down. Most are made of wool, though it's not required. The style is simple and elegant, with pressed creases, slim waistbands, and unobtrusive pockets. Most are high-waisted, and many come with tabs for suspenders.
- ***Khakis*** get their name from a tan color, but these days manufacturers use the term for any sturdy, straight-legged cotton twill trousers, regardless of the dye. Earth tones are still the most common shade. Khakis usually have pleats and cuffs, and are sometimes made more casual with the addition of cargo pockets on the thighs.
- ***Chinos*** are lighter than khakis, have tapered legs, and are usually plain-fronted rather than pleated. They are also less likely to be cuffed, although there are certainly chinos with cuffs out there. Of the two, chinos are a touch dressier -- depending, of course, on color. Lime green chinos are less formal than plain tan khakis!
- ***Jeans*** should be familiar to almost every man: sturdy denim work clothes, usually in blue. The darker the shade and the closer the fit, the dressier the jeans. You can wear dark, fitted jeans with blazers and even suit jackets, while lighter blue jeans are better off as casual and manual labor clothing. Jeans typically sit lower on the waist than other trousers.

- ***Cargo pants*** are loose-legged trousers with buttoning flap pockets on the fronts (and sometimes sides) of the legs. In any material, they're a casual style, and should only be worn for practical purposes.
- ***Overalls*** follow the same rule as cargo pants: practical clothes only, usually for messy manual labor. Don't bother trying to make a style statement with them.
- ***Shorts*** are usually not the most flattering option for a man. Only wear them in very casual social settings during the hottest months. If you do wear them, they should fall somewhere between halfway down your thigh and the tops of your knees -- never far enough to cover the knee, and never more than halfway up the thigh. It's a narrow window. When in doubt, wear lightweight, breathable trousers instead.

Your trouser selection is going to depend a bit on your work needs and your personal style, but broadly speaking most men will own at least one or two pairs each of jeans, khakis, chinos, and slacks.

At the very least you want to own one good pair of gray wool slacks and one pair of dark, fitted jeans. Both are "go anywhere" sorts of clothing -- they can dress up or dress down easily, and they pair well with almost any style of shirt or jacket.



## CHAPTER 28: MEN'S SHOES

Of all the specific clothing items we discuss in this book, men's shoes might be the most *underrated*.

Very few men give footwear enough credit for its ability to make or break an outfit. The right shoes -- poetry. The wrong shoes -- disaster.

Part of that may come from resistance to the price of shoes. Good shoes, like a good suit, cost much more than modern consumers are trained to think of as "reasonable." You're looking at easily \$100 for a basic pair of leather dress shoes; more like \$2-300 for anything unique or special. And that's just for decent off-the-rack shoes -- any kind of custom construction will be even pricier.

### Business Dress Shoes

The highest-formality footwear most men will wear in their lives are black balmoral Oxfords.

The two names are used somewhat interchangeably by retailers these days, although "balmoral" technically refers to a construction style, while "Oxford" originally denoted the height of the shoe (low on the ankle). Nowadays "oxfords" is often used to refer to any dark dress shoe, and "balmoral oxfords" to the most formal versions.

Regardless key feature here is what's called a *closed lacing system*: the small pieces of leather with the eyelets are stitched directly into the uppers, rather than atop them.

It sounds more complex than it is. If the laces are threaded through separate, distinct pieces of leather that lie on top of the body of the shoe, it's an open lacing system, and it's not a balmoral. If the top of the shoe is a single, smooth level, it's a closed lacing system.

For maximum business formality, go with a plain black balmoral oxford, polished to a good shine.

### Leather Shoe Styles

Beneath the black balmoral oxford lies a whole range of leather shoe styles. These should, ideally, be the bulk of your shoe collection, with only a few pairs

of rubber or cloth shoes in there for specific practical purposes.

The following list is arranged loosely in order of formality, from most formal to least, but understand that there is a great deal of variety here. A sober, dark pair of work shoes can look more formal than a flamboyant pair of wingtips. It all depends on the colors, the materials, and what the shoes are being worn with.

Think of all of these as flexible, interchangeable options, and build a collection around the ones you like most:

- **Balmorals** - In addition to the plain black dress style, balmorals with small decorations like broguing or cap toes can be worn with suits to give a slightly more relaxed impression. Men who wear suits on a regular basis will likely want to build a collection. In colors other than black, the style becomes much more relaxed, and pairs well with slacks and sports jackets.
- **Blucher/Derby Oxfords** - A closed-toe, low-ankle shoe with an *open* lacing system rather than a closed one is called a "blucher" or a "derby." Traditionally, these were not business shoes, but they've gained acceptance, especially in America. (Indeed, most stores sell more open-lacing dress shoe than proper closed-lacing balmorals). Relaxed suits, especially those in brown and light gray as opposed to the more formal dark colors, go well with simple bluchers.
- **Dress Boots** - Take a balmoral and extend the height up past the top of the ankle, and suddenly you have a dress boot instead of an oxford. These can be quite dressy -- just a shade less formal than their low-ankled cousins. Plain black styles are an excellent winter/snow option for suit-wearing men who don't want to bother with galoshes or shoe changes every time they step outside.
- **Brogues** - Decorative hole punch patterns in the leather uppers of a shoe make it a "brogue," regardless of construction. Most brogues are blucher-style. They're a versatile style: as long as the patterning isn't too overwhelming, dark leather brogues can go with anything from jeans to dark slacks.

# BROGUE SHOES



Full Brogue



Semi Brogue



Quarter Brogue

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- **Wingtips** - Sometimes called a "full brogue," these have a cap toe with wings that sweep back around the edge of the shoe. The cap and wings are decorated with perforations, and are often a different color of leather than the uppers. The two-tone variety are more casual than monochrome wingtips, but all of them are better suited to dress-casual wear than business attire.
- **Loafers** - Smooth leather slip-ons, often but not always decorated with a buckle, leather band, or tassel across the top of the uppers. Simple black loafers can be worn with suits, but most are designed for more casual wear.
- **Bucks** - Bluchers made out of buckskin, which has a distinctive rough surface that makes it look a bit like suede. The "white buck," made of white buckskin with white rawhide laces and a light-colored sole, is a traditional Southern style that often accompanies seersucker pants and suits.
- **Chukka/Desert Boots** - Low suede boots with crepe rubber soles and a small number of eyelets for the laces (generally four per boot). Classic relaxed footwear -- if you're looking for an easy upgrade from sneakers, chukkas are a good starting place. They can dress up to business casual standards in a pinch, but are mostly a social style.
- **Western/Cowboy Boots** - The American icon. Not for the stylistically faint-of-heart. In some Western states you'll get

businessmen pairing them with suits (especially well-to-do ranchers and oilmen), but most of us should stick to jeans when we wear cowboy boots. Limit the number of other Western accents in the outfit, unless you're actually going to a rodeo or a line dance -- you want it to look like a style, not a costume. Dark jeans, a plain white dress shirt, and a black or charcoal jacket go very nicely with Western boots.

- **Saddle Shoes** - A two-tone style with a "saddle" shape arched over the center of the uppers. Not all are leather -- shiny sneaker style saddle shoes have come in and out of fashion over the years -- but the best-looking ones are suede, preferably in two muted colors. They're a casual, social style, and not meant for business wear.
- **Boat Shoes** - Also called "topsiders" and "boaters," these are leather slip-ons with textured rubber soles. Most have one or two pairs of eyelets and leather laces, but the shoes stay tied, and are pulled on and off like loafers. They're a classic summer style, well-suited to wear with khakis and lightweight slacks. Don't wear socks with them.
- **Work Boots and Work Shoes** - Identical except for their height, these are a balance of style and practicality: tough leather uppers attached to plain rubber soles with a Goodyear welt (accept no substitutes on the latter point). The less contrast you have, the more formal they are: black boots with black laces and soles can dress up pretty far for work clothes, whereas brown boots with black soles and yellow stitching and laces are definitely job site (or rock concert) attire only.
- **Sandals** - If you're going to wear sandals, they should have leather straps and a simple design. "Sport sandals" are, of course, totally appropriate if you're going rafting or something along those lines, but for more relaxed activities -- even ones that happen near water -- class it up a little.

## Non-Leather Shoe Styles

It bears repeating: most of your shoe collection should be leather (the uppers, at least). The difference between a nice outfit with leather shoes and a nice outfit with sneakers is massive.

Cloth and synthetic shoes should mostly be saved for the practical settings for

which they were intended: gyms for gym shoes, and so on.

That said, there are a few cases to be made for wearing casual shoes as part of a conscious style:

- **Canvas Sneakers** -- The Converse All-Star is the iconic example here, but there are plenty of more updated looks in the same general family. They're obviously not business attire, but a brightly-colored pair can be a great way to jazz up a social outfit if you're worried about looking too stiff or frumpy. Red sneakers, blue jeans, and a white shirt with a dark jacket is such a classic funky look that it's almost not funky anymore (but it's still a good one, don't worry).
- **Espadrilles** - At a distance these hemp-soled slip-ons look a lot like canvas sneakers. Some even come with laces, making them harder to tell apart. Treat espadrilles like slightly dressed-up All Stars: a good way to add some color and casual "cool" to an otherwise ordinary outfit. Go easy on pairing them with other brightly-colored or exotic clothing pieces.
- **Gym Shoes** - Rubber and synthetic sneakers aren't usually fashion items, but there are a few specific demographic niches where they're status symbols. If you know you're traveling in circles that are likely to be impressed by \$500 Nikes, maybe they're worth buying and wearing in social settings. For most of us, however, gym shoes should be worn at the gym, and nowhere else.
- **Slippers** - Worth mentioning while we're on the subject of footwear. Own a nice-looking pair that you can wear around the house when you have guests over. It's classier and warmer than going barefoot, and easier on the floors than wearing shoes inside the house.

## Men's Socks

The default rule for socks is to match them to the color of your trousers.

It's a good rule. It's simple, elegant, and safe. You'll never go wrong doing it. The goal is to avoid making an awkward break in your look -- you want eyes to move up from your feet past your trousers and all the way to your face without getting hung up on something weird-looking about your ankles.

Matching the sock color to the shoe color is a *distant* second-best strategy. It's better than a total mismatch, but not by much. In some cases it's almost counter-

productive -- if you've got trousers that are lighter than your shoes (medium-gray slacks with black dress shoes, for example), dark socks are going to look jarring against the trouser cuffs.



If you can't pull off a close match, it's often better to go with a deliberate contrast. Many men keep a few pairs of brightly-colored socks (red and lavender are popular options) so that they'll always have a contrasting option for their trousers. At the strictest levels of business formality you need to go with matching socks and trousers, but outside of those settings a bold, deliberate contrast is generally acceptable (and even admirable, when it's done well).

Bare ankles are also an option, and indeed the best option, for slip-on shoes. The exception would be black dress loafers worn with a business suit, or pumps worn with formal attire -- those require fine, dark socks. But the rest of the time, if you're wearing slip-on shoes, feel free to go sockless. It's really the most appropriate option.

## CHAPTER 29: MEN'S ACCENTS

The details make the man.

A very small accent piece can have a very big effect on an outfit. Think about the difference between a man in generic office clothes with a paisley tie and the same man in the same clothes with a Mickey Mouse tie -- one's an ordinary worker and the other's a goofball clown, even though the only thing that changed was a narrow strip of cloth on the front of his shirt.

Impressive and unique suits, jackets, and trousers are nice if you can afford them. But most men can't afford to base their personal style on owning dozens of different, high-quality "core" items.

For most of us, that means the smaller (and cheaper) accent pieces like belts and neckties play a big role in the "personal" half of "personal style."

There are a handful of common accent pieces, and a few less-common ones that are worth knowing about. We've covered them all here for you.

### Neckties

Discussions of accent pieces always begin with neckties -- which is sort of interesting, given that most men these days don't have to wear one, outside of special events like weddings. They're just not part of the uniform the way they were fifty years ago.

That said, they *are* still the most easily personalized accent for the workplaces where they're required. If you work in a business-dress or business-casual office where neckties are the norm, it's worth using them to vary your style a bit.

Wearing a tie every day, of course, seems by definition the opposite of variety. That's why it's worth owning one or two each of several distinct styles:

- **Diagonal stripes** are about as default as it gets. A solid base color with thin, wide-spaced stripes of another color (or several other colors) is always unobjectionable. It allows for infinite variations without much thought -- just get a few in different color schemes, and suddenly you've got "variety" in your wardrobe. Easy as that.
- **Solid colors** are either bland or bold depending on the color. They look better when there's a visible texture or pattern than when it's

literally just a solid block of one unbroken color. Dark, conservative colors (think burgundy, royal purple, hunter green, etc.) work well; brighter colors like red and orange can sometimes work as "power" ties, but tend to be a little novelty overall.

- **Figure patterns** describes any tie with a solid background overlaid with small, repeating designs. Fleur-de-lis, dots, and crests or logos are all common. The more empty space there is, the more formal the tie looks, so a series of very small figures spaced far apart is more formal than one of larger figures placed close together.
- **Paisley** is essentially a busier and more varied figure pattern. It's quite popular for neckties, and gives a bit of a relaxed air without becoming novelty or tacky. A few paisleys in conservative colors are always worth having as an alternative to the more staid diagonals and figure patterns.
- **Grids and checks** are not the most common family of patterns for neckties, but they exist, particularly in tartan/plaid. Most are fairly casual -- good for adding uniqueness to a business-casual wardrobe, but not well suited to strict business attire.
- **Knit ties** are typically monochrome, but have a bumpy texture that acts as a pattern. They're more casual than smooth-surfaced ties, and a bit retro these days. You'll mostly see them on guys with thick-rimmed glasses and trendy haircuts. That's not a bad thing, as long as you know the look you're going for.

A good mix of styles helps keep you from always looking the same when you're wearing ties every day. If you're in a workplace where ties are optional, mix it up -- wear a tie some days, an open collar others, any maybe something as casual as a turtleneck on Fridays.

The knot of the tie should always fit comfortably within the spread of your shirt collar (see our chapter on Men's Shirts for details about collar spread). At the bottom, the tip of the tie should fall just past the top of your belt (or waistband if you're wearing suspenders).

Popular tie widths change somewhat with fashions, but in general you want to stay in the neighborhood of 3 1/4" or so. A quarter-inch in either direction is fine; much more than that starts to get noticeable as either a "skinny" or a "wide" tie.



As a final note, bow ties *are* an acceptable substitute for a regular necktie. Avoid plain black or white ones -- those are reserved for semiformal and formal wear, respectively -- but feel free to mix colored/patterned ones in with the more common long-style ties. They're novel enough that you should avoid them in strict business dress situations (where the goal is to blend in), but otherwise they're fair game.

## Pocket Squares

The rental tux industry has tried to re-craft the pocket square as some sort of matched pairing for neckties.

Ignore all that.

Pocket squares are their own separate accent piece. They can *complement* the tie -- or anything else in your outfit, for that matter -- but they shouldn't look like a matched set. And you can (and should) wear one without a tie, so long as you're wearing a jacket with a breast pocket.

There's really no reason to go without a pocket square, unless you feel like your outfit has already reached the maximum number of colors and patterns it can contain. Even then, you can always wear a simple white square -- and if that's going to be enough to overwhelm your outfit, it had problems already.

If you've got the pocket for it, throw a square in there. Brighter colors and patterns are, obviously, less formal, while solid colors are more formal, with plain white the most formal option (and, indeed, used all the way up to true formal attire).

The fold of the square determines much of how it appears on your body. Sharp-edged folds with a defined shape are more formal than loose ones. Most fall into a few basic categories:

- **Horizontal folds** are a simple flat edge of the square emerging from the pocket. They run parallel to the top of the pocket itself, so that you just have a narrow band of horizontal, colored cloth visible against the background of your jacket.
- **Peak folds** keep the straight edges, but have a corner thrusting up from the pocket instead of a flat edge. That makes a clear, crisp triangle shape against the background of your jacket. Some folds will produce two or more slightly offset peaks, sometimes called a "crown fold."

- **Puff folds** are made by simply blousing the center of the square out a bit and then having that as the visible part emerging from the jacket. It makes a casual, slightly wrinkled dome-shape against the jacket.
- **Flute folds** are an inverted puff fold -- instead of the center of the square, the tail ends are visible above the pocket. This makes an inherently random shape, and takes a bit of fiddling to get just the right about of "accidental" disarray. It's casual, but very striking when done properly.
- **Rose folds** or **flower folds** are most commonly seen in pre-made squares for rentals, but you can create one yourself with a bit of effort. With careful twisting, a bundle that looks like a rose just starting to blossom can be created and tucked into the jacket pocket. For obvious reasons, this is most commonly done in red, but any square can be made to work if you want an extravagant fold.

It's good to vary your colors and folds up, especially for differing levels of formality. A really crisp, starched horizontal fold in plain white looks great on a charcoal business suit, but it's a bit out of place against a tweedy brown sports jacket.

One important closing word on pocket squares: these are *clothing*, not tools. Wiping your nose on your pocket square falls into the same category as wiping your nose on your sleeve. Carry a sturdy, practical handkerchief in an interior pocket for that sort of task. No one should ever have to wonder if the elegant silk accent in a man's jacket pocket has snot wadded up inside it.

## Belts

One of the more critical accents out there, belts can run the whole gamut from neutral necessities to elaborate centerpieces.

The default behavior here should be matching your shoes. If they're brown, wear a brown belt. It doesn't have to be the exact *same* brown, but you want to be in the same general color family.

Is that a hard and fast rule? No. It's just a good option that's never going to be considered "wrong." Men who want to make more of a statement (or whose shoes are making a statement) can certainly break the "rule."

Narrower belts are dressier than wide belts, and the same holds true for the buckles. Strict business dress always calls for a thin, black leather belt with a

narrow metal buckle; as standards relax, both the belt and the buckle can widen.

Keep in mind that metal matching follows the same rules as leather matching -- you want everything to be in the same color family. If you're wearing a blazer with brass buttons, don't wear a belt with a silver buckle. Find a gold/brass tone one instead.

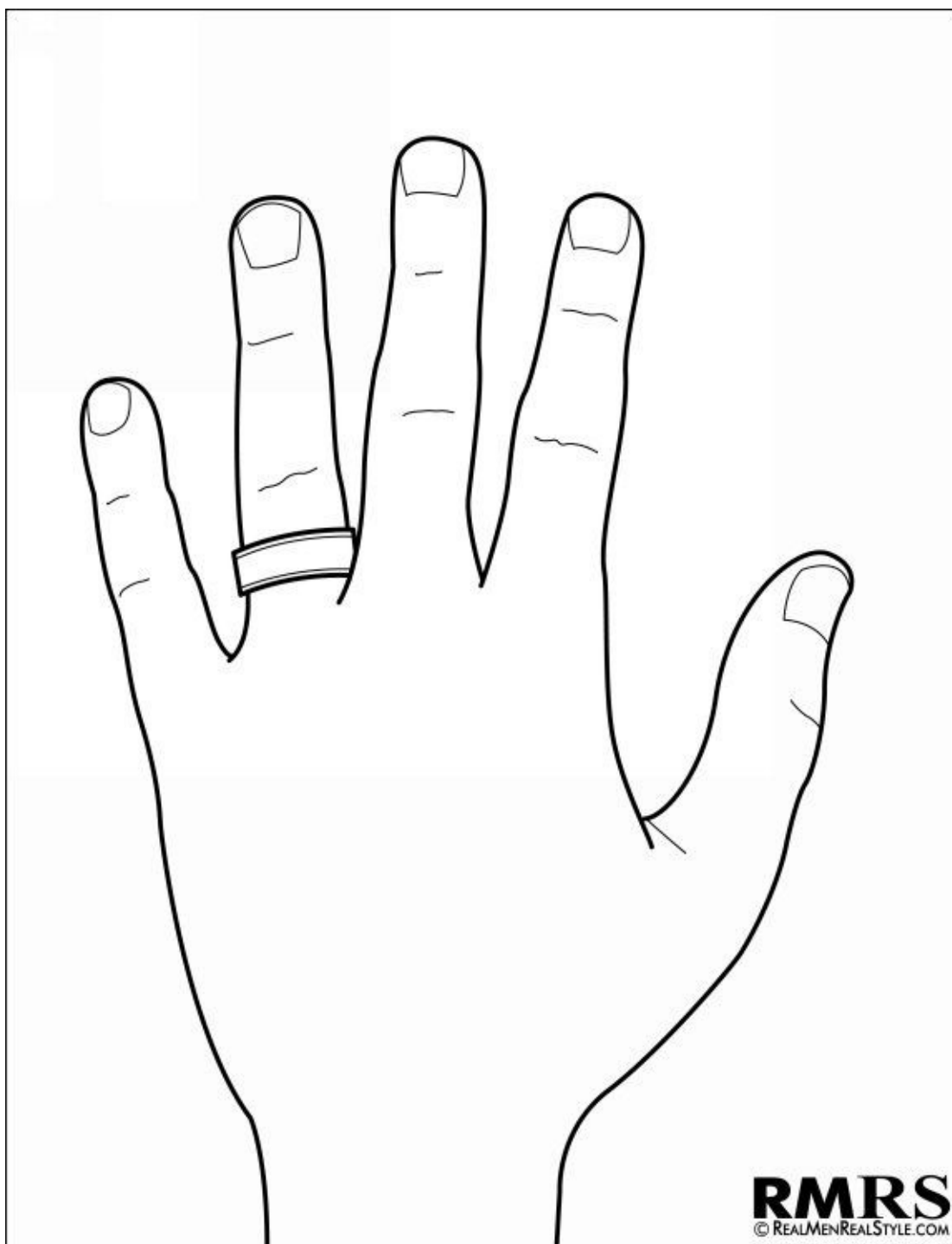
If you're looking to experiment a little with belts as statement pieces, consider investing in a good leather belt with snaps that allow you to swap different buckles in and out. It's an easy way to get dozens of belts for the price of one -- or at least, for the price of one plus the cost of whatever buckles you pick up.

## Jewelry

The role of jewelry in fashion is rapidly expanding, especially for men.

Traditional metal and gemstone jewelry, with the exception of watches and wedding bands, remains mostly a feminine style. But that "mostly" is fading fast -- increasingly, men are getting comfortable with "statement" jewelry beyond simple functional or symbolic pieces, worn just for fun and fashion.

Think of it as an option but not a necessity. (With the exception of a wristwatch. Every man should own a wristwatch, preferably two or three. Fishing in your pocket for a cell phone when you want to check the time looks awkward and unsophisticated.) Jewelry can be a good way to spice up an otherwise-bland outfit, but a little goes a long way, and there are other accents that will work just as well.



If you do decide to try out some men's jewelry, stick to a few basic guidelines:

- **Match your metals.** Don't mix gold tones and silver, and if you have similar but different metals (a white gold ring and platinum watchband, say), keep them far apart. A plain, gold wedding band is an exception -- you can wear that with anything, since everyone

knows what it is and why it's there.

- **When in doubt, go thick.** Solid-looking jewelry is more masculine than fine, delicate jewelry. You don't need massive, chunky chain links, but you do want jewelry that has a little heft of its own. Be careful of fine chains and very slender bands or loops.
- **Don't overdo it.** One or two pieces of jewelry is usually enough. Multiple rings or necklaces is pushing your luck -- wear one that makes a simple, clear statement, rather than half a dozen that clash and tangle.

Be aware that there are also still some social taboos in place, especially regarding piercings. Any jewelry beyond a dress watch and a wedding band is suspect in conservative settings (including many business environs), and earrings or more exotic piercings are right out.

Tastes are changing, and in more liberal sectors like computer technology you may be fine wearing jewelry of any kind. Just be aware that older, more conservative men are likely to look on it with disfavor.

## Other Accents

Neckties, pocket squares, and belts will make up the bulk of most men's accent pieces. Those are the simple, basic items you've got excuses to wear almost every day. (Jewelry can be worn every day as well, but is less universally accepted among men.)

The list doesn't stop there, however. Men looking for ways to personalize their style have a number of other, less common options to consider:

- **Scarves** - There's a joke in women's fashion: "throw a scarf on and it's an outfit." That works for men, too, to a certain extent. A simple, solid-colored scarf adds variety when you feel like your outfit is lacking it. They're also a good way to put off winter coat season -- a sports jacket or suit with a scarf tucked into the front opening will keep you warm down into surprisingly low temperatures.
- **Hats** - The days are gone when a gentleman never left the house without his hat, but you can still wear one if you want to. The key is to make it look like part of your outfit, not a costume piece -- as stylish as a fedora or a homburg is, it requires a real business suit to go with it, otherwise you look like you stole your dad's hat for dress-

up games. Go for a casual style like a flat cap when you're wearing casual clothes, and save the expensive felted hats for business attire.

- **Gloves** - If you have a nice overcoat (see the next chapter for more on those), it deserves nice gloves. Plain black leather is a good starting place, but for the true dandy, colored leather gloves are a way of telling people that you have a conscious sense of style and the money to spend on it.
- **Canes** - Only if you need one for support, if you please. But if you do, don't be shy about making it a nice polished wood one. Wooden or metal tops are preferable to ivory, simply for ethical reasons...but if you *inherited* an elegant ivory-handled cane, from a relative who didn't know any better, well. Don't let it go to waste.
- **Boutonnieres** - Small, live flowers tucked into the buttonhole of a jacket lapel are a unique way to add some color. We most often see them at weddings and semiformal or formal events, these days, but you can wear one any time you have a working buttonhole on your jacket. Stick to a single blossom, however -- tiny bouquets or sprigs of baby's breath are strictly a feminine style.
- **Glasses** - Regular or sunglasses, these can be style pieces if you want them to be. For practical purposes, men who need glasses should usually have one pair of slim, metal frames that can be worn in business situations, but there's nothing wrong with owning a second pair that's a little funkier.

Any and all of these have the potential to become the most noticeable part of an outfit. They don't have to be -- but they can be.

Learn to use accents surgically. Keep them restrained, except when you want to make a statement. Then pick one or two accents with a little pop to them, and throw them on top of some interchangeable core pieces.

Suddenly, you've got a distinct personal style that no one else can imitate. And all it took was a good wardrobe of versatile core pieces, plus a couple unique accent pieces.

Simple, right?

## CHAPTER 30: MEN'S COATS AND OUTERWEAR

We close our section on specific clothing pieces up with a quick look at the outer layer: overcoats and other outdoors gear.

The difference between a coat and a jacket, in theory, is that coats are only worn outside. Jackets can be worn inside, if desired.

Practically speaking, most people use the terms interchangeably. Don't get too hung up on the details. The important thing to realize is that, if the weather calls for a coat, that coat is going to be the first thing people notice about your style until you get inside and get the coat off.

That makes selecting one a process worth a little time and thought.



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## Dress Overcoats

For the truly well-dressed man, long wool overcoats are the rule.

It's the only appropriate accompaniment to a suit, and a good plan for when you're wearing a blazer or sports jacket and anything nicer than jeans, as well.

The big concern here is that the coat be *longer* than the jacket worn under it. If the hem of your suit or blazer jacket is poking out from underneath your coat, you're doing it wrong.

Thus, the dressiest styles of overcoat are all thigh-length or longer. While they may look very uniform to an untrained eye, there are actually several distinct styles, with varying levels of "dressiness," each one offering a slightly different look and attitude.

- **Chesterfields** are the gold standard: straight wool overcoats with small lapels and no tapering or horizontal breaks (belts, seams, etc.). There are both double- and single-breasted versions. The height of the front opening varies, but in all cases it should cover the jacket beneath it entirely. They can be more or less casual depending on color and on the presence of details like pocket flaps; the most formal versions are a plain, dark color with simple jetted pockets.
- **Polo Coats** are a relaxed American take on the dress overcoat. They have broad lapels, double-breasted fronts, and built-in belts like a trenchcoat. The classic style is beige camelhair, but dark colors are acceptable as well, and slightly more dressy. It can be worn with suits, especially in a dark color, even though it is not as formal as a Chesterfield.
- **Crombies** are a basic style that can dress up or down easily. They are plain and a bit severe, with a straight-sided cut and small lapels. The cut is shorter than that of a Chesterfield or a polo coat -- Crombies end around mid-thigh, rather than at or past the knees.
- **British Warm Coats** are thick overcoats made from Melton wool, which has a distinctively fuzzy surface. They have wide, working lapels that can button closed in bad weather. Warm coats are less dressy than polos or Chesterfields, but could still conceivably be worn over a suit -- just not to the most formal of events or business meetings.

- **Covert Coats** were originally a British hunting style worn by the upper class. As is common, the casual sportswear of the upper class became the dress clothing of the middle class, and these days many men wear covert coats over suits or blazers. They are single-breasted twill coats with large interior pockets, usually made in a light color with a dark, contrasting collar.
- **Inverness Coats** are formal overcoats with wide, baggy sleeves and either fur or velvet trim. They're quite old-fashioned, but if you're someone who attends multiple formal events a year, it might be worth investing in one. Otherwise, dial it back a notch.
- **Trenchcoats** - Technically, the trenchcoat is quite a casual style. These days they fall into an odd place -- a bit too formal to wear with jeans, but not formal enough to wear with a business suit. That makes them a good choice for a man who favors social suits, blazers, and sports jackets.

## TRENCH COAT



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### Sharp Casual Coats

Somewhere between purely functional work coats and long wool overcoats lie the "sharp casual" options -- too relaxed (or too short) to pair with business suits, but more stylish than a basic parka or puffer.

Some of these are thicker and heavier than others, and materials can vary widely. It's worth your while to own two or three, so that you have options for all temperatures and weathers.

- **Duffel Coats** are large military-style coats made from thick "duffel" wool. They are long, unshaped, and generally buttoned with wooden toggles (for which they are sometimes called "toggle coats"). They have long been a favorite of students and left-wing intellectuals, especially in Europe.



- **Greatcoats** are another military style: double-breasted with large, turned-out cuffs. Most fall past the knees. The most common source is military surplus (many militaries around the world still issue

greatcoats). Some feature half-capes down the back for additional rain protection.

- **Norfolks** are a tweedy, frumpy style from the early 20th century. They have short lapels and a built in belt stitched to the front, and look something like a snugged-up sports jacket that buttons down to the bottom hem.
- **Peacoats** are one of the most popular sharp-casual coat styles. They are double-breasted, with wide lapels and large buttons. The style was naval in origin, and navy blue is still the most common color, but hardly required.

## PEA COAT



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- **Leather jackets** come in any number of styles. The most common are moto jackets (tight-fitted with short or no collars), bombers (bulky with turndown collars lined in something soft and warm), and biker or "easy rider" jackets (lancer-front jackets with conspicuous zippers and snaps).

## FLIGHT LEATHER JACKET



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- **Fatigue jackets** are another military style, but shorter than greatcoats and duffel coats. They end at the hips, with a full-length front that either zips or buttons all the way up, and usually feature large flap pockets on the front. Turndown collars are typical, as are epaulets.
- **Blousons** are slightly dressier, more fitted fatigue jackets with a cinched waist and a very slight flare down to the hips. Dressier versions, featuring lapels, are sometimes called "Eisenhower jackets." Avoid the puffy "aviator" style -- it was a brief craze in the 90s, and is

better left there for good.



- **Waxed jackets**, especially the Barbour brand, are a good way to dress up functional weather protection. They're reasonably rainproof, and the quilted construction offers warmth, but the outsides are kept dark and neat for a slightly dressy look. For mild wet weather, they're a perfect compromise between style and function. (If you're going to spend all day out in a serious rainstorm, obviously, wear the best outdoors gear you can get and don't worry about the style.)



## WAXED COTTON JACKET

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- **Jean jackets** can look sharp, if they're well-fitted and you're careful what you wear them with. Loose, unfitted ones are strictly work wear however -- clothes for manual labor, not for style. Keep the denim dark and fitted when you want to impress, and never wear one with jeans on your lower half as well.

## DENIM JACKET

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Other styles of casual coat -- canvas barn coats, for example, or plaid wool hunting jackets -- aren't really meant as style pieces. That doesn't mean they can't look good, but their primary purpose is purely functional.

Own one or two for when you need the protection. Try, however, to wear a sharper-looking coat whenever the weather permits...and whatever you do, don't wear big, puffy ski parkas anywhere you can't see lift chairs.

Seriously.

## CHAPTER 31: MEN'S UNDERWEAR AND UNDERSHIRTS

It's not a style choice that most people are going to see, but your undergarments do bear some careful consideration, for your own comfort if nothing else.

Every guy makes his own call about his most intimate layers. But broadly speaking, it's better to have undergarments than not, both above the waist and below it.

They're not glamorous, but undergarments serve several practical function. They protect your clothes from your skin and vice versa, absorbing sweat and keeping heavy, stiff fabrics from rubbing uncomfortably.

Underwear is a lot cheaper to replace than items like trousers and dress shirts. That makes the cheap cotton layer of fabric a pretty good investment in the long run. It prevents shirts from getting "pitted out" with sweat stains, and keeps the crotch of your pants from turning funky on you (an especially important consideration for raw denim devotees who avoid washing their jeans).

At the end of the day, it's worth the added expense to have a good underlayer. Some men just can't stand that extra layer of fabric, and if that's you, it's not the end of the world -- no fashion police are going to come for you because you're not wearing an undershirt. But it's a smart investment for men who don't mind the extra layer.

### Undershirts

The basic function of your undershirt, as noted above, is to absorb sweat and pad your skin.

That means buying a style that suits your physical habits and your patterns of sweating.

- **T-shirt** style undershirts are simple, basic, and functional. They've got sleeves that reach a little ways down your bicep, making sure the whole armpit is covered, and the crew neck takes care of chest and back sweat all the way up. The biggest disadvantage is that the neck of the shirt is visible if you undo any of your shirt buttons.
- **V-neck** undershirts solve the T-shirt problem with a triangular cutout at the neck. They're ideal for wearing under dress shirts without

neckties, or other styles of shirt that expose some of your neck and collarbone.

- ***Sleeveless*** undershirts (which go by a lot of names, some more offensive than others) are lightweight and usually have low, scooped necklines, meaning they're unlikely to poke out from underneath your shirts. However, they don't do nearly as much for armpit absorbency, so if you're a heavy pit-sweater they may not do you much good.
- ***Long-sleeve*** undershirts provide added insulation in cool months. Many are made from high-performance synthetic fibers for extra wicking. They tend to be a bit pricier than short-sleeve versions, but make invaluable underlayers for men who are active outdoors.

With any of these styles, a close fit and a thin, lightweight material are paramount. Don't cut corners here! A saggy undershirt isn't absorbing any sweat, and it's going to put wrinkles in the layers above it as well.

For mostly sedentary men plain cotton works just fine. It isn't glamorous or very absorbent, but it's cheap and easy to clean. Men who do a lot of physical activity may want to invest in a higher-performance material. Athletic brands do well, as do specialized undershirt companies.

## Underwear (Lower Body)

We won't go into too much detail here. A man's drawers are a personal matter.

You're looking for something that fills the same basic functions as an undershirt, with the added consideration that you want everything snug but not too tight. A good fit is not just a visual consideration down there!

Most lower-body underwear fits into one of these categories:

- ***Briefs*** - Short, snug undergarments that cover from the waist to the upper thigh, angling downward to the crotch. They're plain, functional, and often thought of as unglamorous, especially in the cotton Y-front "whitey tighty" style. Darker colors make them a bit more flattering, for men who worry about such things.
- ***Boxers*** - Looser undershorts where the legs are longer than the crotch. These are widely viewed as less constricting than briefs, but they may also cause lumps or wrinkles in trouser legs if the fit is too loose.

- **Boxer-briefs** - A practical style that combines the longer legs of boxers with the skintight fit of briefs. Better support than boxers, and a little more modesty than briefs.
- **Thongs** - An abbreviated style with a small triangular pouch of fabric in front and a very narrow band in back. Generally worn with costumes or very tight pants where any other style would leave visible lines on the outer garment.
- **Long underwear** - A thin, snug lower-body sleeve that runs all the way down to the ankles, or in some "footie" styles to the toes. Generally worn for winter insulation, with the best models made from lightweight and moisture-wicking wool/synthetic blends.

In years past the "union suit," which combined a long-sleeved undershirt and long underwear into a single, unbroken garment, was a practical option for working men. These days it's a bit of a relic, and certainly not a fashion statement. You might wear one for a long day of working in the winter cold, but otherwise most men prefer to keep their underwear two-piece.

## Visible Underwear and Underwear as Outerwear

The trend of wearing thin undershirts visibly in hot weather isn't a new one. Men have been doing it for practical purposes as long as undershirts have existed, and it's come into and out of fashion for various subcultures (especially youth ones) over the years.

That doesn't make it a good idea, however.

A man who aspires to seeming "well-dressed" or "sharp-looking" can't show any visible underwear, on his upper body or his lower. That includes sagging pants that show the waistband of his undershorts, obviously, but it also applies to a visible curve of undershirt seen through a collar opening.

Make sure you're picking underwear that can stay hidden when you want to look good. V-necks or scoop necks are ideal for wear with dress shirts.

Casual dressers can, in *some* cases, look all right wearing an "undershirt" as a basic T-shirt. It's never going to be fancy, but a tightly-fitted white T-shirt with jeans has been a sexy rebel sort of look since the 1950s. Use it with caution, and only if you've got the body for it, but if you want to break the look out at a tailgate party or something, more power to you.

Just be aware that visible underwear is always an ultra-casual look. It's deliberate rule-breaking -- fun, sometimes, but not what to wear when you need to be taken seriously.

## CHAPTER 32: MEN'S BAGS AND LUGGAGE

Travel is a necessary part of almost every man's life. It's also not a bad time to look your best.

Commercial travel, these days, is more likely to result in delays, confusion, and bureaucratic hassle than not. Unfair as it seems, a man in an expensive-looking suit or jacket is going to find his problems resolved *much* more quickly than a man in a beat-up pair of jeans and a sweatshirt.

Good luggage is part of a good look. In fact, it's not just reserved for travel -- a man in a sharp business suit needs a leather briefcase, not a school backpack, and even a casually-dressed man will look better carrying a sleek messenger bag than a couple of beat-up old tote bags.



### Day Use Bags

If your wardrobe doesn't include any sort of small bag for carrying papers, laptops, books, and other day-to-day supplies, think about adding one.

Too many guys get out of high school or college and go on using the same old backpack for all their around-town carrying needs.

That's a great look if you want people to think you're still a kid in school, but if you hope to be taken seriously as an adult, you'll need an upgrade. Fortunately, there are varying styles for different levels of formality, so you can pick the one that works best with your day-to-day wardrobe:

- ***Messenger bags*** are a popular option for casual dressers. They sling over one shoulder, are wide enough to fit most laptops plus a few other supplies, and are made of sturdy materials like ballistic nylon or leather.
- ***Satchels*** are shorter and narrower than messenger bags, and look a bit old fashioned (mostly because they're not shaped for modern laptops). They work well for tablets, however, and are gaining popularity. Just beware of anything that strays too far into "man purse" territory. You want a satchel with some heft and breadth, and enough structure to look solidly square rather than soft and sack-like.
- ***Briefcases*** are the go-to staple any time you're wearing a jacket. Match the color to your other leathers where possible (brown cases with brown shoes, etc.), and the formality to the rest of your outfit. A case with a couple visible outer pockets, a chunky zipper, *etc.* is fine with a sports jacket or blazer, while a business suit calls for something fairly sleek and minimalist.
- ***Attaché cases*** are sturdier, travel-oriented versions of briefcases with hard edges and interior trays. They work well for business travelers who need a few small items on hand at all times, and want a little extra protection for everything inside the case.

Stay away from backpacks, tote bags, and anything excessively feminine, especially when you're wearing a suit or sports jacket. You don't want to go to all the work of dressing up just to have the bag you're carrying drag your look right back down.

## Travel Luggage

Luggage can come in just about any size you need, from a light day bag to a massive suitcase or duffel.

For travelers who dress nicely, opt for something with a dressy look. Good



features include:

- A fixed shape, rather than soft sides. Lumpy bags are inherently less "dressy" than ones with a defined shape.
- Dark, solid colors. Stay away from decorative prints or bright, primary colors.
- Sturdy handles and zippers. It seems like a minor detail, but thin, cheap-looking straps that wad up when you grip them look bad -- and they're not very comfortable to carry, either.
- No visible logos apart from a personal monogram. A company name on the zipper pull or a small crest is fine, but big athletic company logos splashed across the side of the bag are the opposite of dressy.

On the practical side of things, you also want a sturdy exterior material. Ballistic nylon with ripstop construction works well, or serious travelers can invest in knifeproof weaves (and even bulletproof sides, although that's realistically overkill for most men).

The ideal size is whatever you need to fit all your supplies -- unless, of course, you're trying to fit your luggage in the carryon racks, in which case you're best off buying something sized specifically for current airline requirements.

## **Packing Men's Clothes**

There's no right way to pack a suitcase, but there are lots of wrong ones.

Your goal is always to have your clothing arrive as unwrinkled as possible, with no long-term damage caused by the travel.

Shoes on the bottom works well, since it keeps the dirty soles off other clothing. Shirts and trousers can be folded flat and laid on top of just about anything.

Jackets are the biggest challenge, and there are a couple of ways to handle them. One is a garment bag, which is specifically shaped and sized for clothes on hangers. Another is to fold the jacket's shoulders together, tuck the sleeves flat, and fold the whole thing in half, but that puts a crease down the middle.

Creative packers can turn the jacket's inside layers out, press the sleeves together, and roll the whole thing up, creating a tube with the jacket lining facing outward. That has the advantage of protecting the exterior fabric, while avoiding any folding that could leave a crease.

## How to Roll a Suit Jacket



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Small items can be tucked in the cracks between larger ones, or stored inside shoes. A Dopp kit or other small, watertight bag for toiletries is highly recommended, however -- even a single cracked bottle of soap or shampoo loose inside your luggage is one too many.

## CHAPTER 33: MEN'S COLOGNE AND SCENTS

While cologne isn't, strictly speaking, a piece of clothing, it is a part of many men's wardrobes, and as such it bears a brief discussion.

*Less is more* should be your watchword here. Cologne should be noticeable to someone who is in your physical space: anyone you're dancing with, hugging, or inadvertently pressed up against by a crowd.

If anyone beyond that radius can smell you, you've got too much scent on. A small touch at the collarbone is usually ample.

### Choosing a Scent

Men who've never worn cologne before may find the language used to describe scent blends dizzying.

Take heart -- nine-tenths of it is just marketing fluff. There are a few considerations to be aware of, however:

- **Composition** is usually given in descriptive terms like "notes of," and so on. In theory, the scent/flavor notes are listed in order of appearance and strength. So if the bottle says "Notes of bergamot and citrus, with a hint of pine," you'll supposedly smell the bergamot up front, followed by the citrus, with a lingering trace of pine after those pass. Take it with a grain of salt, however -- the descriptions are often finalized by marketers, not perfumers.
- **Oil content** determines how strong and long-lasting the scent is. A higher oil content makes the smell last longer, but it also limits how much you can use. Colognes typically have a higher oil content than eau de toilette (EDT) blends. Use the former when you want a noticeable scent to last all evening, and the latter when you just need a faint hint of scent or a quick freshening-up.
- **Release year** makes more of a difference than you might think. The perfume industry moves in cycles, and one brand's offerings can change dramatically from year to year. That means scents get "dated," and in some cases also means they're not meant to last. Try to buy small bottles unless you use a lot of a particular blend, so that you can update from year to year.

Price is also a consideration here, and you should be thinking along these general lines: the more you pay for a scent, the more you should demand from it. A \$30 bottle of cologne might be perfect for you, if you're lucky, but if it's just a touch too sweet, or too strong, or some other minor flaw, it's not the end of the world. A \$300 bottle, on the other hand, had better be pretty perfect for you.

## **Other Scented Products**

If you're wearing cologne, stay away from other scented products. You don't want the odors clashing. Even if the effect is too subtle for people to notice on a conscious level, it can color their subconscious reaction to your presence.

If you don't wear cologne, a mildly-scented aftershave, deodorant, or even skin lotion can be a harmless way to add a bit of scent to your "appearance." Just keep it moderate, and don't mix your scents. A splash of Bay Rum is fine; a splash of Bay Rum plus a lavender scented deodorant and an aloe skin cream is not.

## **Section 6: Conclusion**

## **CHAPTER 34: WARDROBE MAINTENANCE**

Congratulations -- unless you skipped straight to this chapter, you should by now possess all the information you need to be a snappy dresser!

Unfortunately, even snappy wardrobes wear out. And since nice clothes are expensive to replace, you want that process to take as long as possible.

Take a few basic steps to keep your wardrobe in good shape. It'll prolong its lifespan, and you'll look nicer along the way. There's nothing particularly flattering about missing buttons or frayed cuffs.



## **Wool Clothing Maintenance - Suits, Jackets, and Slacks**

The fact that you can't throw it in a regular washer and dryer gives wool a reputation for being high maintenance, but it's actually one of the sturdier fabrics out there.

Most higher-end menswear stores will have "suit brushes" for sale (usually up by the front counter). You can use them on suits, jackets, and trousers -- pretty much anything made out of woven wool.

When you're done wearing a piece of wool clothing, put it back on its hanger and give it a quick brushing. It may feel excessive, but you're removing bits of dirt and debris from the wool fibers. Left in the weave, the particles will sever and snap individual fibers, wearing down the overall surface much more quickly.

Note that tape or lint rollers are not really a substitute. Lint rollers can't brush through the wool fibers to clear out things that have slipped into the weave of the fabric itself -- and in many cases, if the adhesive is too strong, it actually pulls up and snaps fibers. Stick to the wool brush.

Since wool has a good "memory," hang your wool clothes on sturdy wool hangers, with a curved shoulder shape for jackets and a wide dowel for trousers. Straight wire hangers will put a crease in jackets and pants. Heavy sweaters should be folded and stored in drawers to prevent stretching.

Dry cleaning should usually happen every third or fourth wear, depending on how long you wore the item in question and how heavily you sweat. Don't over-clean your wool clothes -- if they look and smell fine, there's no need for dry cleaning. While the process is designed to be as easy on the clothes as possible, it still involves soaking them in chemicals and drying them out. Over time, dry cleaning does wear out wool cloth.

## **Cotton Clothing Maintenance - Shirts and Trousers**

One of the main appeals of cotton clothing is its low maintenance needs. You can throw most cotton items in a conventional washer and dryer and call it a day.

Depending on the weave, a delicate cycle or low heat may be necessary. Follow the instructions on the tag and you'll usually be safe. Since cotton is susceptible to mildew and mold damage, make sure clothes are completely dried before you put them in a drawer. Hang them or leave them flat on a clean, dry surface if they come out of the dryer damp.



Cotton loses its shape easily. If you need cotton clothes to look sharp and fresh (and you do, for proper business attire at the very least), iron them, and use a touch of starch when you want that razor-edged collar look.

With dress shirts, be mindful of collar stays. Some manufacturers include small, flat plastic tabs inside the edges of the shirt collar to keep them stiff and straight. You'll need to remove them before washing the shirt -- plastic stays can heat and curl in the dryer, or even melt, damaging the shirt. Metal stays are unlikely to be damaged by washing, but they could theoretically heat enough in the dryer to scorch the shirt, so pull them out just to be safe.

## Shoe Maintenance

Leather shoes are among the more expensive wardrobe items out there for men. They're also more dependent on maintenance -- cared for regularly, good leather can last a lifetime, but neglected leather gets ruined very quickly.

Care for your shoes (and other leather items) with a series of staggered steps:

- Brush shoes off briskly when you take them off. Keep a rag or a shoe brush by the door (or wherever you store your shoes) to make it easy -- if the tool's right there, you're much more likely to use it.
- Wipe wet shoes off when you come in. Don't leave them to air dry, especially near a heat source like a radiator. If you get salt or other sidewalk chemicals on your shoes during the winter, be sure to scrub it off with a damp cloth right away. Salt will permanently crack and stain the leather.
- Every few months (or when you start seeing visible scuffs), clean your shoes, dry them thoroughly, and (once they're completely dry) polish them.
- Once or twice a year, apply a leather conditioner. Work the conditioner into the leather, wipe off the excess and let it sit for a night. Then wipe it down again and polish over the conditioner. That seals it in and keeps the leather nice and supple.

The difference in lifespan really is impressive, here. If you're careful with them, well-made leather shoes should be good for a decade or more. If you're not, they could be permanently warped or stained by the end of a year.

## Repairs and Other Maintenance

A single frayed cuff or missing button has the power to make your whole outfit look sloppy. Fix damaged clothing as early as possible -- it minimizes the damage, and it reduces your temptation to throw a damaged piece of clothing on because it's not *that* bad and probably no one will even notice, right?

Most things can be taken care of at a tailor's shop, or even some dry cleaners. Small repairs will only cost a few bucks. Skilled tailors, while more expensive, can give even a badly damaged piece of clothing a new lease on life.

Key places to watch for maintenance needs include:

- **Buttons** - These are almost always the first to go. Keep an eye on them, and replace them when they *start* getting loose -- trimming a loose button and replacing it is much less damaging to the fabric beneath it than letting it rip free on its own.
- **Cuffs** - Inevitably the first place to start fraying. Trouser cuffs can be hemmed slightly shorter, tucking the frayed cloth inside the cuff, until you run out of spare length in the legs. Shirt cuffs are a bit more challenging because of the buttons, but can usually be hemmed the same way at least once.
- **Collars** - Fraying can be an issue here, but mostly you're watching for staining and rolling. Give stained collars a long soak in some water with a splash of vinegar (or detergent) and then wash them conventionally to get rid of the stains, and iron them to keep them from curling up on themselves. Just don't mix the order up -- you never want to iron stained clothing. That'll set the stain in permanently.
- **Linings** - Jacket and suit linings tend to wear out before the body of the suit. That's the point, really -- it's cheaper to have a lining patched or replaced than to throw out an expensive piece of wool clothing. This is a bit more expensive than having a button or a hem fixed, and you'll need to go to a professional tailor, but it's worth the investment once your lining starts to tear or wear through. The next thing to go will be the jacket, and wouldn't you rather keep that for another decade or two?

These are small, somewhat tedious tasks and errands that are easy to put off. *Don't*. Your clothing will literally last for decades if you take good care of it, and the savings from that are well worth a bit of inconvenience and up-front expense

in the short term.

## CHAPTER 35: GROOMING

Your body is part of your look too! The best clothes flatter it, rather than hiding or disguising it, so make the job easy for your clothing by taking care of your body too.

This is pretty basic stuff, so we won't go into too much detail, but whenever you want to look your best (and you always want to look your best, right?) you should do a quick run-down of all the obvious grooming details that people will notice:

- **Hair** should be consistent. We don't say "neat," because sometimes a deliberately mussed look is the right one, but in those cases it should look *deliberate*. Just "mussed" is bad.
- **Facial hair**, similarly, should have a unified look. Go for the artfully scruffy look if you must (it comes in and out of fashion, mostly depending on what the leading men in Hollywood blockbusters are doing), but trim around the edges. There should always be a clearly-defined border to your beard, and it should always end just below the chin. No neckbeards, please.
- **Nails** should be short, blunt, and clean. If you tend to get build-up under them (and a lot of guys do), invest in a small nail brush. Keep it by the sink, and use it whenever you wash your hands. Toenails should be trimmed too, even when it's not sandal season, both for your health and for the occasional barefoot-around-houseguests type of situation.
- **Scents** of any kind -- especially cologne, but also aftershave and even your soap and shampoo -- should only be noticeable to a person you are embracing. If it can be smelled from further away than that, the scent is too strong. Obviously, that applies to body odor, too, so keep your pits clean and throw on some deodorant if you need it.

Try to make minor grooming maintenance a daily habit. When you really need to impress -- an interview, say, or a date -- you can take a little more time and care to make sure everything's neat and crisp, but that job will be a lot easier if neatness is your default habit.



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## THE FINAL WORD

That was a lot of information.

You didn't sit down and read it straight through, right? (We told you not to do that.)

There are a lot of good takeaways that we could restate here. Section by section, you've read about why dressing well matters, how to build a stylish wardrobe from scratch, what to wear when, the physical properties of clothing, and detailed descriptions of all the major menswear items out there.

All of those are important. It's good information.

But at the end of the day, here's the most important question: are you happy with your look?

That is to say, do you feel as attractive as you want to? Are you getting the respect you think you deserve? Are you successfully avoiding any of the negative consequences of looking sloppy?

If you've achieved those things, congratulations! Your look is a good one. You are dressing well, for all practical purposes.

If you're *not* achieving all those things yet, there's work to be done. But don't panic. You've got a great book to help you along, right?

Happy dressing, gentlemen!

## Reminder - Bonus Posters

A final reminder:

Your purchase of A Man's Guide to Style comes with *free* poster-sized infographics from [www.RealMenRealStyle.com](http://www.RealMenRealStyle.com).

We've included nine illustrated posters on everything from how to wear black tie to how to fold a suit jacket and how to tie your necktie eighteen different ways.

They're our gift to you, free with the purchase of this book.

To access the bonus posters, go to <http://www.realmenrealstyle.com/dresslike-a-man-bonus/> and use the password "dresslikeaman" -- all one word and no capital letters.

Enjoy!